

**View from the East:
Arab Perceptions of United States
Presence and Policy**

Brent J. Talbot and Michael B. Meyer

INSS Occasional Paper 48

February 2003

USAF Institute for National Security Studies
USAF Academy, Colorado

Report Documentation Page

*Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE FEB 2003	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED -		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE View from the East: Arab Perceptions of United States Presence and Policy		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
		5b. GRANT NUMBER		
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
		5e. TASK NUMBER		
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USAF Institute for National Security Studies, USAF Academy, CO, 80840		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The original document contains color images.				
14. ABSTRACT see report				
15. SUBJECT TERMS				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: a. REPORT unclassified		17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 98	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
b. ABSTRACT unclassified				
c. THIS PAGE unclassified				

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Air Force, the Department of Defense, or the US Government. The paper is approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

Comments pertaining to this paper are invited; please forward to:

Director, USAF Institute for National Security Studies
HQ USAFA/DFES
2354 Fairchild Drive, Suite 5L27
USAF Academy, CO 80840
phone: 719-333-2717
fax: 719-333-2716
email: inss@usafa.edu

Visit the Institute for National Security Studies home page at
<http://www.usafa.edu/inss>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
Executive Summaries	ix
THE ARAB PERCEPTION AND CONSENSUS PROBLEMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR US POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST, <i>Brent J. Talbot</i>	
Introduction	1
The Perception Problem	3
The Consensus Issue	11
Islamic Radicals	13
Islamic Revivalists (Reformists)	14
Islamic Government in Theory	15
Colonialism in the Middle East and the Introduction to Democracy	23
Policy Recommendations and Conclusion	30
Conclusion	33
Notes	34
ARAB PERCEPTIONS TOWARD US FOREIGN POLICY: WHY PERCEPTIONS MATTER AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE AMERICA'S IMAGE IN THE ARAB WORLD, <i>Michael B. Meyer</i>	
Introduction	41
Iraq—"The Innocent Suffer"	46
The Arab-Israeli Crisis—The Seminal Issue	51
Adding Fuel to the Fire—The Second Intifada	62
Conclusions—Implications for US National Security and Policy Recommendations to Improve America's Image in Arab Eyes	68
Notes	79

FOREWORD

We are pleased to publish this forty-eighth volume in the *Occasional Paper* series of the United States Air Force Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). This timely and insightful set of papers written by two USAF area specialists provides complementary—and together comprehensive—coverage of the critical topic of Arab perceptions of United States policy. Further, the papers expand that coverage to address in detail some of the implications of those perceptions for US military presence and policy in the region. Brent Talbot focuses his analysis on the key segment of the region's population that stands between the totally dispossessed and deprived radical base and some entrenched, corrupt regimes. This Arab majority, he argues, can reshape the region's states into culturally compatible and accountable (if not purely democratic by western standards) revisionist Arab and Islamic political and economic states that are much more compatible with United States values and presence. This is a significant message in terms of the longer-term strategic postscript to the current US-Iraq conflict. Mike Meyer focuses his analysis at the more operational level of US military personnel on the ground in the region, but comes to complementary conclusions as to United States public diplomacy and presence. He argues that American military personnel and programs must purposefully shape the relationships—and through them perceptions and attitudes—with the emerging military and political leaders in this region of transition. This approach also provides a key element to the state-building exercise that will likely soon present itself. Together the two papers suggest a wisdom of experience—academic and practical—that is essential to the high-stakes endgame that lies before us.

About the Institute

INSS is primarily sponsored by the National Security Policy Division, Nuclear and Counterproliferation Directorate, Headquarters US Air Force (HQ USAF/XONP) and the Dean of the Faculty, USAF Academy. Our other sponsors include the Secretary of Defense's Office of Net Assessment (OSD/NA); the Defense Threat Reduction Agency; the Air Staff's Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Directorate (XOI) and the Air Force's 39th Information Operations Squadrons; the Army Environmental Policy Institute; and the Air Force Long-Range Plans Directorate (XPXP).

The mission of the Institute is “to promote national security research for the Department of Defense within the military academic community, to foster the development of strategic perspective within the United States Armed Forces, and to support national security discourse through outreach and education.” Its research focuses on the areas of greatest interest to our organizational sponsors: arms control and strategic security; counterproliferation, force protection, and homeland security; air and space issues and planning; information operations and information warfare; and regional and emerging national security issues.

INSS coordinates and focuses outside thinking in various disciplines and across the military services to develop new ideas for defense policy making. To that end, the Institute develops topics, selects researchers from within the military academic community, and administers sponsored research. It also hosts conferences and workshops and facilitates the dissemination of information to a wide range of private and government organizations. INSS provides valuable, cost-effective research to meet the needs of our sponsors. We appreciate your continued interest in INSS and our research products.

JAMES M. SMITH
Director

**THE ARAB PERCEPTION AND CONSENSUS PROBLEMS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR US POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST,**

Brent J. Talbot

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is a preliminary effort to assess Middle Eastern perceptions of the US and the resulting effect on US foreign policy in the region. My effort follows a three part outline: a) Arab perceptions of the US; b) how a lack of consensus within the civil polity, especially the relationship between governments and Islamic forces, impedes progress in the various states of the Arab world and contributes to misperception; and c) US policy recommendations and conclusions.

Arab perceptions have turned virulently anti-western in recent years. The Arab-Israeli dispute has been a particular “sore spot” since Arabs believe the US could pressure Israel into accepting peace with the Palestinians. Arab media and education efforts also contribute to misperceptions by misinforming the Arab public. Moreover, US policy is viewed as anti-Muslim, a crusade against the “axis of evil,” and unfair due to practices that favor Israel over the Arabs.

The lack of consensus—disagreement over what is the real problem and who is the real enemy—complicates any hope of Arab unity. Not only are populations alienated from governments, but they see Islam as their only solution, and Islamic solutions fit into two major categories: radical extremism along the lines of Osama bin-Laden and company, and a more democratic revivalist or reformist variety, that unfortunately, has suffered from government efforts to equate it with radicals. Revivalists also suffer from a lack of recognition by the populace. Still, revivalist elements are present in the few reform-minded governments of the region and it is hoped that their examples might be illuminated for others to follow.

A return to Islam is sought by peoples of the region. Islam is the only legitimate means of opposing corrupt, autocratic regimes. The US should support peaceful transitions toward Islamic reforms as the overall policy strategy in the region.

Overall Goal: Achieve Peaceful Transitions toward Islamic-style democracy.

--Increase the pressure on corrupt Arab regimes to share power with Islamic revivalists (consistent with US values); reward governments showing democratic tendencies such as Jordan,

Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, and Qatar. This will also improve America's image by eradicating the "hypocrite factor" that results from US aid to corrupt regimes.

--Encourage economic reform to alleviate the plight of demography (goes hand in hand with democratic reforms).

--Increasing the pressure on the Palestinians and Israelis to move the peace process forward is a most essential element due to its role as the biggest problem area vis-à-vis Arab perceptions of the US. More importantly, solving this problem eliminates a major scapegoat Arab governments have used to put off reforms.

--Increase efforts to sell image of America as a value-laden society (not corrupt as portrayed in Hollywood stereotypes) in order to improve understanding between Arabs/US, which in turn, will improve Arab image of democratic government and improve the likelihood of their evolution towards democracy in the region.

**ARAB PERCEPTIONS TOWARD US FOREIGN POLICY:
WHY PERCEPTIONS MATTER AND WHAT CAN BE
DONE TO IMPROVE AMERICA'S IMAGE IN THE ARAB
WORLD, *Michael B. Meyer***

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arab perceptions of US foreign policy toward the Arab world, particularly since the onset of the second, or Al-Aqsa, *intifada*, are extremely poor. United States foreign policy is viewed by Arab populaces and certain members of Arab governments as biased against the Arabs and in favor of Israel. Some Arabs are aggravated that the US maintains a military footprint in the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf, and others criticize the US for what they claim is giving only lip service to promoting democracy in the Middle East. Two dominant issues that incite Arab opinion against US foreign policy are America's handling of Iraq over the past decade and America's orientation toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. This paper seeks to introduce and explain in detail Arab reactions to US foreign policy toward the Arab world.

For this research, the author relied heavily on discussions he had during his tour as Air Attaché in Damascus, Syria, on conversations he participated in as Political Advisor at US Central Air Forces (USCENTAF), on interviews with subject matter experts

in Washington, DC, and on press reporting from the Arab world and from some US sources.

The author believes image matters. Negative perceptions harbored by Arabs toward US foreign policy endanger US national security interests by threatening moderate Arab governments allied with the US and by encouraging extremism against America. While Arab popular perceptions toward US foreign policy are unlikely to change in the near future, the US must pursue proactive initiatives to favorably affect Arab opinion over the long term and, thus, protect US interests. To better promote its image in the volatile Middle East, America must adopt an enhanced approach to better project the political, economic, diplomatic, and informational instruments of power.

xi

**THE ARAB PERCEPTION AND CONSENSUS
PROBLEMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR US POLICY IN
THE MIDDLE EAST**

BRENT J. TALBOT

INTRODUCTION

Although Islam is not in power in any Arab state, it has effectively replaced socialism, secularism, and Arab nationalism as the dominant form of opposition to all regimes.

--Ziad Asali¹

Throughout the Muslim world, there is widespread bitterness against America, even among pragmatic and well-educated businessmen and professionals, who may sincerely deplore recent atrocities, condemn them as evil, and feel sympathy with the victims, but who still resent the way Western powers have behaved in their countries. This atmosphere is highly conducive to extremism.

--Karen Armstrong²

In the West we have witnessed the democratization and modernization of our societies and the accompanying forces of secularization throughout the last century, especially during the more recent decades. For example, America has witnessed courtroom battles further separating the state from religion such as the outlawing of prayer in public schools. We have observed the growing importance of individual rights, the triumph of a woman's rights over those of her unborn child, and a call for the "celebration of diversity." As the influence of traditional Christian religious values has thus declined, America has continued to become more modern, prosperous and increasingly secular. However, this deterioration of values is viewed by the Arab and Islamic world as evidence of western decadence and

Talbot—Arab Perception and Consensus

corruption. Their view of our world is overshadowed by this important-to-understand, religiously based perception.

Religion is often an overlooked factor in the study of international relations. As a social science discipline, international relations was founded upon a tradition of seeking rational explanations for the behaviors of mankind in a nation-state setting, which meant that religion became a less-important factor with the evolution of modernization and its effects upon interstate relations. Yet in the Arab and Islamic world, religion has remained a major focal point and is presently the major legitimate force opposing the secular, autocratic (and often corrupt) governments of the region. Thus, one cannot discuss relations between the Arab world and the West without understanding the crucial role of religious perceptions.

It is the purpose of this paper to first, identify common perceptions of the West held by Arabs that came about due to what I consider a lack of information and misperception. Second, I want to elaborate on how the breakdown of consensus among Arabs/Islamists foretells a dangerous future for the Middle East. The lack of consensus means that there are two major groups competing for power—governments and Islamists—and the Islamists are further divided into two general categories of radicals and revivalists/reformists. The continuation of deteriorating conditions could bring about the overthrow of governments and victory for the radicals if democratic reforms are not enacted. I will also discuss the ramifications of Islamic political thought within this setting. Finally, I want to identify US policy options that may help to bring about reform in the region in an effort to unite Islamic forces behind the revivalists toward a

common good that satisfies US interests and brings about the best possible future for Arabs.

THE PERCEPTION PROBLEM

The perception problem in the Middle East became a serious matter of public interest in the West during the aftermath of al-Qaida attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 (hereafter “9/11”) “when cameramen caught crowds celebrating in Gaza or people expressing satisfaction in Cairo and other cities in the region over the demise of the WTC.”³ Although these scenes likely reflected a minority, they shocked much of the world outside the Middle East and particularly in the United States. Were they representative of Arab views? Do the Arabs hate America, and if so, why?

The Arab-Israeli dispute is the primary source of Arab irritation against the United States. Indeed, a 2001 poll of Saudis, Kuwaitis, Emirates, Egyptians, and Lebanese Arabs concluded that 60 percent of the Arab public in those states claimed the Palestinian conflict as the “single most important issue” of personal concern.⁴ Moreover, Hilal Khashan’s study of Levant Arabs indicated that the Palestinian question concerns the entire Arab, and even the Islamic, world.⁵ Furthermore, Arab news sources put an anti-American slant on the historical passage of the UN resolution calling for the partition of Palestine. They portray US pressure from President Truman as the major factor; the President did indeed pressure Greece and Liberia to vote for partition.⁶ What is ignored is the equal or greater role of the Soviet Union in obtaining passage of the partition vote. Lewis describes the significant influence of the Soviets in procuring a majority of votes, and that they gave *de-jure* recognition after the

Talbot—Arab Perception and Consensus

vote, whereas the US limited itself to *de-facto* recognition of the Jewish state. Such arm-twisting helped to carry the resolution by a mere three votes since a two-thirds majority was required to pass in the General Assembly. Moreover, the Soviet Union was the first to supply Israel with arms through its Czech lackey; and later, other Europeans, especially the French, continued to supply Israel with weapons (including help with nuclear weapons development, according to Cohen⁷). It was not until after 1967 that the US supplied weapons to Israel.⁸ Despite this, the *Arab News* claims that “America thus doomed the people of Palestine to a life of destitution, exile and suffering. It deflected their history from its preordained course, robbed them of their patrimony and reduced their sense of nationhood to a fragment.”⁹ These are powerful words of condemnation pointed at the United States instead of others who played the larger role in early Israel-Palestine history.

Arabs believe the United States, as a superpower, imminently capable of pressuring the Israelis to grant Palestine statehood and to end its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. During the past two years, well over 1800 Palestinians have died at the hands of the Israeli military and over 600 Jews have fallen victim to suicide bombings and other attacks by radical, militant Palestinians.¹⁰

The Saudi Foreign Minister expressed this concern when, during a *New York Times* interview, he appeared “angrily frustrated” about President Bush’s failure to do more. Bush’s perceived lack of effort “makes a sane man go mad” according to the Minister. The Saudis are reportedly bracing for a “furious gathering storm” among their populace over the Palestinian plight.¹¹ Moreover, an Arab businessman reported that during a telephonic conference between United States and Arab business leaders, he expressed

frustration over American views, stating that “all they want to know about is Israel and its security. What about the Palestinians and their security? We will not compromise on what is a legitimate issue.”¹²

Animosity is especially manifest among Palestinians, as evidenced by the number identifying themselves as supporters of radical Islamic groups. Only 15 percent supported such groups during December 2000, but 18 months later (April 2002), over 26 percent supported groups like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Al-Aqsa Brigades, which are opposed to peace negotiations brokered by the United States.¹³ Furthermore, though the Egyptian government signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1978, it now “encourages the Egyptian press to be hostile towards Israel.”¹⁴ The Egyptian government is the largest Arab recipient of US aid and is thus working directly against US interests with such a policy. Lastly, Islamic states gathered in Malaysia in April 2002 and voted on a resolution which declared that Palestinian resistance to Israel could not be viewed as terrorism, including suicide bombers who act within Israel’s borders. Some 57 Muslim states attended the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) meeting and a majority voted contrarily to United States views in its conduct of the war against terrorism.¹⁵ Hendawi concludes that suicide bombers are now portrayed as the “ultimate Palestinian heroes” and “gone is the optimism of the mid-1990s when peace seemed a realistic proposition.”¹⁶

The Arab media is a leading source of misperceptions among the Arab populace. In an *al-Jazeera* talk-show that aired 10 July 2001 (before the WTC/Pentagon attacks), bin-Laden was portrayed as an Arab hero who stood up to the West. The talk-

Talbot—Arab Perception and Consensus

show host declared that “bin-Laden has made the greatest power in history shudder at the sound of his name, while the . . . heavyweights [other Arab leaders] arouse only America’s pity and ridicule.” On the same program, a viewer from Jordan who called in stated that “anyone who attacks bin-Laden and accuses him of terrorism stands with the enemies of our nation.”¹⁷ *Al-Jazeera* claims a viewership of over 35 million Arabs and is thus the most influential television station in the Middle East, a region where most people claim to get their news from television. The *New York Times* reports that *Al-Jazeera* broadcasts a mix of anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism, and that its independent “reporters see themselves as anti-imperialists . . . convinced that the rulers of the Arab world have given in to American might.”¹⁸

Misperceptions also abounded after 9/11 when many in the Arab world did not believe bin-Laden was responsible for the attacks. For example, a regional Arab opinion poll concluded that 31 percent of respondents blamed Israel for the attacks on the US while only 27 percent blamed bin-Laden.¹⁹ Even more shocking, a (non-Arab) Pakistani poll reported that 71 percent of respondents agreed that 4000 Jewish workers had not gone to work in the twin towers the morning of 11 September because they had been warned by Mossad (Israeli Secret Service) agents who were responsible for the attacks. Though the rumor was traced back to Hezbollah news sources in Lebanon, it was carried throughout the region on state-run and private news channels as well as leading newspapers.²⁰ Interestingly, even the Syrian Defense Minister professed this belief at a Damascus meeting where he was hosting a delegation of western military officers from the British Royal College of Defence Studies.²¹

As America went after the Taliban government in Afghanistan, Arab news channels reported it as a war against Islam, especially after President Bush called the War on Terror a “crusade,” invoking memories of Christian Crusaders retaking the Holy Land from Arabs during the 11th and 12th centuries.²² Bush’s “axis of evil” speech strengthened this view because two-thirds of the axis (Iran and Iraq) is Muslim, and the terrorist organizations he named during the speech were all Muslim.²³ Palestinians were particularly opposed to intervention in Afghanistan. A Bir Zeit University poll found 76 percent opposed to joining the US-led coalition and an even greater number, 89 percent, believed the United States was not justified in attacking Afghanistan. Additionally, 64 percent felt that the attacks actually violated Islamic law.²⁴ As an interesting insight, Kuwaiti liberal parliamentarian Ahmad al-Rubei has said that because of media reports, “the Arab person is waking up and going to sleep every day with the different and exaggerated analyses that are not based on realities but rather on wishes and prefabricated positions. Every news item in any US newspaper is being treated as a complete truth, every US statement is taken as part of the official policy, and every analysis, though very imaginative, is taken very seriously.”²⁵

Indeed, US government declarations regarding Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein from power are especially worrisome to the Arab populace. Pressure has mounted since UN Security Council Resolution 1441 (8 November 2002) required a return of weapons inspectors and threatened Iraq with “serious consequences” if they were not allowed to return. The inspectors, which had been in place during the aftermath of the Gulf War to

Talbot—Arab Perception and Consensus

search out Weapons of Mass Destruction, had subsequently been forced out of the country by Saddam in 1998, and none of the enforcement mechanisms of earlier Security Council resolutions were invoked as punishment. Inspectors are now back due to the new resolution; however, the Iraqi regime's weapons declaration, mandated by 1441, has left many questions unanswered.

Recently, inspectors uncovered undeclared chemical artillery rockets as well as documents related to uranium enrichment indicating potential violations of the new resolution.²⁶ Thus, the pressure to oust Saddam builds as of this writing and war is a distinct possibility in the near future.

Most Arab states are reluctant to support American efforts to oust the Iraqi leader without UN approval. Moreover, key members of the Security Council, namely veto-wielding members France, Russia, and China, along with several non-permanent members, are at least initially reluctant to approve the use of force against Saddam and prefer continued inspections, especially since the items found to date are “short of a ‘smoking gun,’” according to these and other potential allies.²⁷ This means that the United States has not yet done enough to convince allies of the need for war at this time; and interestingly, Bush has declared America will fight without UN approval in a reduced coalition if necessary.²⁸ This does not bode well for obtaining Arab support against Saddam unless more is done to persuade allies to vote for a Security Council war resolution.

Such reluctance is expressed in various ways throughout the region. In the United Arab Emirates, typically considered pro-US, women in a university political science class have said that “any war against Iraq would be a war against them.” Despite their

disdain for Saddam, they believe “conflict will breed more extremism” and are “no longer sure whether America is friend or foe.”²⁹ In believing that the war could create more bin-Laden types, these students demonstrate a sense of increasing frustration among the Gulf populace toward United States policies in the region. Even Egypt has been reluctant to grant use of its Cairo airport as a transit point for military supplies that may be used against Iraq. An aide to President Mubarak stated that Egypt cannot allow use of its airfields without UN authorization for war due to the “extreme sensitivity” of public opinion.³⁰ Recent polls back this finding (69 percent of Egyptians hold an unfavorable view of the US) and in West-friendly Jordan, 75 percent have expressed an unfavorable view of America.³¹

Also worrisome is the attitude of typically pro-Arab intellectuals and businessmen. Mohammed Ali Musfir, a US-educated professor in Qatar, said “Americans are very blind with their power, and they do not read our culture.”³² Furthermore, while discussing the impending war against Iraq, Ghassan al-Sulaiman—a Saudi businessman who has a vacation home in California and is also US-educated—said “five years ago I never would have imagined the US acting like this, like a bully . . . and if people like me feel this way, then you have to imagine how other Arabs are feeling.”³³ Such attitudes are likely prevalent, and if so, the US should reconsider the way it is handling the situation.

Of greater concern is a recent report of the Washington-based Middle East Institute (MEI), whose top leadership visited Egypt and Saudi Arabia—key American allies in the region—to assess the mood. They report that Arabs in those countries perceive the US as being driven by the

Six C's—cowboys, colonialism, conspiracy, Coca-Cola, cowardice, and clientitus. The client is Israel. The cowardice is the perception that we are a schoolyard bully. Coca-Cola is the symbol of an alien consumer society; conspiracy is based on unrealistic expectations of US capabilities; colonialism is premised on a US drive to control oil; and cowboys is drawn from a Hollywood style perception that the [Bush] Administration shoots from the hip. The reality is that when Arabs think of the United States they think of Israel.³⁴

MEI ascertains that these perceptions will be “magnified tenfold if the United States invades Iraq,” and though neither country is expected to abandon the United States, both Egypt and Saudi Arabia are concerned about the “long-term consequences of America’s standing in the region” and for their positions as supporters of the United States. War is likely to fuel “an incredible impulse to turn to Islam and fundamentalism and away from moderate institutions and democracy,” and Arabs fear that Americans fail to recognize this fact. Equally disturbing is news from Arab political analysts reporting greater antagonism towards the US than at any time in recent memory, and that such perceptions are driven by stereotypes which bear little resemblance to reality or the intent of US policy.³⁵

In sum, Washington should give heed to Arab opinions in the region, especially when moderate and typically pro-western forces begin to speak out against planned US actions, and efforts to undo the stereotypes and false Hollywood images should also be considered. Graham Fuller relates the following synopsis of the problem:

The US tendency to disregard popular Muslim concerns as Washington cooperates with oppressive and insecure regimes fosters an environment in which acts of terrorism become thinkable and, worse, even gratifying in the eyes

of the majority. The vast bulk of Muslims, of course, will go no further than to cheer on those who lash out. But such an environment is perhaps the most dangerous of all, because it legitimizes and encourages not the tolerant and liberalizing [revivalist] Islamists and peacemakers, but the negativistic hard-liners and [radical] rejectionists.³⁶

THE CONSENSUS ISSUE

During the same timeframe that the West has become modern and more secular, the Arab world has faced two major crises, according to Bernard Lewis. The first is *“economic and social: the difficulties arising from economic deprivation and, still more, economic dislocation, and their social consequences [a phenomenon widely reported in the press].* The other is *political and social—the breakdown of consensus, of that generally accepted set of rules and principles by which a polity works and without which a society cannot function* [italics added for emphasis].”³⁷ The crises have elevated the legitimacy of Islam as the “dominant form of opposition” against ruling regimes, but it is a *disjointed opposition lacking the consensus* required to remove and replace governments.³⁸ As evidence of a consensus problem, Ziad Asali indicates that neither the “regimes” nor the “Islamist opposition . . . represents a majority, since a large middle-ground is occupied by politically marginalized or impoverished sectors of society,” but they are the “two major internal forces” that shape the “political dynamics” of the region.³⁹

Islamic opposition is also disjointed in two ways: first, it focuses its fury upon the West and in particular, the United States and not just upon its own governments. Western colonial powers were blamed, not only due to their perceived role as harbingers of immoral principles, but also because they were viewed as the muscle behind the ruling Arab elite, none of which had been

Talbot—Arab Perception and Consensus

elected by their peoples and most of which had become corrupt and autocratic. Moreover, passing blame to the West was encouraged by the Arab regimes through their monopoly on education and the media, which were used to vilify the West and make it the scapegoat for all problems endemic to the state. Governments sought to deflect blame from themselves, and thus pointed to the West or the plight of the Palestinians as the real cause of suffering and the lack of development in the region. Thus, blaming the West for its own ills is a major occupation of Arab society, and it contributes to Arab perception of the United States. Secondly, the Islamic opposition is again divided into two loose groupings which I prefer to label as the extremists or *radicals* and the reformists or *revivalists* (thus avoiding the generic term fundamentalist), which again is evidence of a lack of consensus, making it difficult to generate a united front against government corruption.

Islamic Radicals

Osama bin-Laden is the champion Islamic radical of the present. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 (2001), the USS Cole attack (2000), and the US embassy bombings in Africa (1998) were all attributed to bin-Laden's al-Qaida terrorists who are attempting to remove US influence from the Middle East so that they might then conquer the corrupt regimes of the region and replace them with Islamic government.⁴⁰ According to a RAND study, their rationale for wanting to replace Arab leaders ties back to rejection by those very regimes that had supported them during their time as Mujahedeen warriors in Afghanistan. After beating the Soviets, the core al-Qaida veterans expected to be welcomed home as heroes; but instead, Middle Eastern governments became

suspicious of their religious fervor. The arrival of American troops to fight the Gulf War and the continued repression of Islam by the American-backed regimes provided ample grounds for their desire to renew their fight against a new enemy: the US.⁴¹ Kepel adds that they had been “completely divorced from the social realities of the world around them, locked as they were into a sectarian religious logic.” Moreover, their efforts in the early nineties to “export jihad” into Bosnia, Algeria, and Egypt were thwarted with western assistance; western aid which came to them during the Mujahedeen era had evaporated. Though they had beaten a Soviet “evil empire,” they were now viewed as “terrorists and fanatic criminals” themselves.⁴² Even among Middle Easterners, according to a *Wall Street Journal* source, “few people endorse bin Laden’s goals or his methods;” still, this Arab also believes that “bin Laden constitutes the only so far effective acknowledgement of discontent. The United States misses the boat because it is identified with support of Israel and discredited regimes.”⁴³ In other words, many in the Muslim world view bin-Laden as a Robin Hood of sorts, brave enough to stand up to the United States and wage war against the West in his desire to restore the Islamic Caliphate and rid the Muslim world of western and particularly American influence.

Islamic Revivalists (Reformists)

So, what about the revivalists? Interestingly, early 20th century Islamic reformist movements sought to mix western and Islamic thinking to create Islamic democracies. Leading Islamic scholars of the era believed there was a “natural affinity of Islam with science and reason,” which justified the mixing of secular and Islamic traditions, and that “reason [w]as given by God to

protect humankind from either excess or adulteration of religion.”⁴⁴ Though early experiments for reform went astray, Many Muslim scholars among the intelligentsia continue to call for moderation and government reform. Unfortunately, they are most often ignored by the media or jailed by the government, and their small numbers and lack of recognition have left them with little influence.⁴⁵

As stated earlier, the lack of consensus results from a number of fault lines in the Arab world: Arab governments versus society, Islamic radicals versus revivalists, “Arab street” tensions split between the dislike of their own governments and disdain for the West. One must also mention the artificial borders that resulted from colonialism and split the Arab nation into a number of states creating further tensions between governments. With so many fault lines, it was easy for the West to destabilize the Arab/Islamic nation during the colonial period. I will try to address these fault lines by reviewing the historical pattern of Islamic government, how it was modified by western influence, and how the introduction of democratic principles led to revivalist thought, which has the potential of providing an alternative future for the region.

Islamic Government in Theory

Ibn Khaldun, a fourteenth century Arab philosopher, laid the foundation of Arab political thought with his description and theory of the rise and fall of states. Interestingly, he began his theory by highlighting the inherent evil nature of man and his need for a ruler to keep himself under control. Khaldun notes: “people need someone to exercise a restraining influence and keep them apart, for aggressiveness and injustice are in the animal

nature of man.”⁴⁶ Thus, a ruler is needed, someone who in Khaldun’s words has “royal authority . . . the person who exercises a restraining influence, therefore, must be one of themselves. He must dominate them and have power and authority over them, so that no one of them will be able to attack another. This is the meaning of royal authority.”⁴⁷

Khaldun’s theory divides his world into two groups: the sedentary, city dwellers who live more prosperous lives and entrust the defense of their lives and property to a royal authority; and the Bedouin, who depend on the land and their animals for survival and are more independent and take care of their own needs. Because the Bedouin live in the desert and rule themselves, they need a special type of restraint in order to maintain a peaceful society. Khaldun calls this “group feeling”—*asabiya* in Arabic. He also states that only blood ties can produce this feeling, ties of kinship and tribalism. Due to the earlier mentioned natural injustice of man, *asabiya* is required to overcome aggression. The leaders among the Bedouin are greatly honored, and this respect for them generates obedience and order among the group. Because this self-restraint is inherent among the Bedouin, it makes them a more religious and worthy society than the sedentary who are coerced to obey their governors. Khaldun then relates the cycle behind his theory. As the Bedouin rise in strength and conquer sedentary societies, they eventually become sedentary themselves because of their removal from the harsh Bedouin lifestyle and the loss of *asabiya* brought about by the mixing of blood lines. Eventually, their generation falls and is conquered by another outside, more noble and worthy Bedouin force. And so repeats this cycle of Arab history.⁴⁸

Khaldun's theory provides interesting insight into the nature of Middle Eastern governments. As is easily observed, most tend to be authoritarian. Even in states like modern Egypt which has the semblance of democracy, the authority of Mubarak prevails.⁴⁹

In the early stages of governmental development Khaldun recorded the importance of royal authority in civilized developed regions. These authorities were totalitarian in nature. Among the Bedouin tribes outside the developed regions, rulers led without the need for a popular vote. As the Bedouin conquered the more civilized societies, they ruled in the same way a tribal leader would rule: with domination. This tradition influences the nature of authoritarian governments in the Middle East today.

Additionally, one must consider why the royal authority was overthrown in Khaldun's theory. He basically states that the new Bedouin conquerors were “more worthy.” Because of their closer ties to *asabiya*, they were closer to their culture and religion, and in that respect deserved to be followed. They deserved to be the new rulers replacing those corrupted by the luxuries of sedentary life.

Such a cycle of renewal has been followed throughout Middle Eastern history. According to Dekmejian, at least eight cycles of declines followed by Islamist responses can be documented since the Umayyad decline in the eighth century.⁵⁰ Extremists in the Middle East today justify their actions through this constant need for self renewal. Most existing governments are corrupt and are not fulfilling the peoples' needs, so the “more worthy” extremists have a right, like the Bedouin of old, to attempt to overthrow them. The reformers, revivalists, see this same need, but seek reform in a more peaceful way. There are also theoretical

differences that separate the ideologies of the extremists from the revivalists.

In early Islam, Hiro suggests the Caliphate suppressed independent thinking because it would lead to opposition which would in-turn lead to chaos. Order needed to be maintained at all costs.⁵¹ This contributed to the development of authoritarianism and slowed the technological advancement of the Arab/Turkish/Persian world which had competed with and maintained an edge over Christian Europe until 1683, when the Ottomans failed to capture Vienna.⁵² This turning point was followed by the rise of European colonial empires, including the loss of the Balkans and Tartarstan in the late eighteenth century and an even bitterer blow in 1798 when Napoleon conquered Egypt.⁵³

For the Ottomans, these losses drove them to the Tanzimat reforms of the nineteenth century which introduced western legal codes, the founding of military schools, creation of a Constitution and parliament, and other western style reforms aimed at helping them compete with the West. At the same time, they were seeking the secularization of Muslim society.⁵⁴ Still, the Ottoman Empire continued to decline and experience the loss of more and more territory to the West. Finally, Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909) decided it was time to change direction. In 1878 he suspended the constitution, dissolved the parliament, and worked to undo earlier secular reforms. “He repudiated Islamic modernism and turned to traditional Islamic values and thought.”⁵⁵ Although his reforms failed to save the empire, they lengthened the path toward modern Islamic reform, a path which had already been started by the Salifiyah movement beginning in the seventeenth century.

Even before the Tanzimat reforms, Arabs were dissatisfied with Turkish rule. The Salifiyah movement was dedicated to the “puritanical reform” of Islam. It arose in various regions from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries: the Wahabbi movement in the Arabian Peninsula, the Shawkani movement of Yemen, the Sanusi movement in Libya, and the Mahdi movement in the Sudan.⁵⁶ Each movement became the ideological basis for religious reform and a challenge to Ottoman power.

Interestingly, some of the leading theoreticians of these early movements were not extremist in their views, but were more revivalist in nature. Rifa'a al-Tahtawi encouraged the adoption of European scientific ideas. He viewed modern scientific thought as compatible with Islam, and the lack of Islamic progress in this realm contributed to its weakness vis-à-vis the West.⁵⁷ Al-Tahtawi also developed a theory of politics. He saw a need for legislative, judicial and executive functions of government, but believed they must be “restrained by higher laws. The ‘ruled’ must be allowed to acquire freedom and public benefits, and their civil rights should be upheld. The ruler should consult both the ulama and scientific specialists in the course of governing. Furthermore, he should be influenced by public opinion.”⁵⁸ Al-Tahtawi did see a danger, however, and “warned that, in France, people believed that national welfare and human progress could take the place of religion.”⁵⁹ Thus, it was still important to maintain an emphasis on morality and faith.

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani’s ideas were similar to those of al-Tahtawi. He noted too that science and the Quran were not in disagreement. He also had political views and played a fundamental role in formulating the Islamic response to domestic

development and western imperialism. Al-Afghani blamed the state of Islamic society on the corruption of Islamic leaders who had “allowed superstition and ignorance to replace reason and enlightenment.”⁶⁰ He also placed emphasis on the need for morality and faith. He stated that “whenever the cause for progress weakens, the result is backwardness and decadence, and whenever the reason for the fall is eliminated, the result is progress.”⁶¹ Al-Afghani even went so far as to assert that the Europeans emerged from backwardness with the religious reformation of Martin Luther.⁶² It is therefore logical that a religious reformation of Islam would correct the misfortunes of the past and bring about a return of Islamic glory. It is interesting to note that, according to Hiro, al-Afghani proposed a parliamentary system of government which he saw as being in line with Islamic precepts.⁶³

Al-Afghani was later involved in condemning the Shah of Iran for giving a tobacco concession to the British. One of al-Afghani’s followers, Imam Mirza Hassan Shirazi, decreed that the faithful should stop smoking until the Shah had withdrawn the tobacco concession. This was the first open challenge to an authoritarian regime in the Middle East, and public opinion actually led to the Shah’s withdrawal of the concession. In other words, the weight of the majority overruled the monarch. The Shah’s authority was no longer divine.

Twentieth century philosophers built upon the ideas of the earlier theorists, but evolved primarily into two schools of thought. Hasan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (1928) in Egypt, initiated the first school which called for more radical measures to bring about a return of Islamic government.

He saw only two choices for the Arab world: to follow the path of the West and succumb to its lifestyle and system, or to choose the path of Islam, which meant a return to Islamic principles, civilization and culture, rule by a Caliph, who by definition is both a political and religious leader, and unification of the Arab peoples. Abd al-Qadir Awdah, a leading theoretician of the Brotherhood, clarified the arguments of al-Banna. He stated that Islam is not just a religion but a system and a state. Every order in the Quran and Sunnah requires Islamic rule and an Islamic state. “Religion cannot exist without the state, nor can the state be sound without religion.”⁶⁴ Still, in a more moderate tone, he also stated that the Caliph should be chosen by the community and may only rule so long as he does what God commands. If he deviates, then the community may depose him and instate another. Thus, Islamic government is not a “dictatorship, because it is limited by the Quran as a constitution.”⁶⁵

Others (al-Mubarak, an-Nubhani) also supported the radical argument. In many instances the Hadith calls for Islamic rule, and the Prophet Muhammad himself established an Islamic state. Without a Caliph today, Islam is in a state of backwardness and degradation, remote from the teachings of Islam according to the radicals. All Muslims are sinners until they establish the Islamic state and unite all of (or at least Arab) Islam. Interestingly, this state should be established by militant means, just as the Prophet first established it, in order for its establishment to come to pass, according to an-Nubhani. Khaldun’s theory outlining the necessity for renewal could be used as justification for the use of force. After all, the Bedouin were “more worthy” and deserved to conquer the sedentary. Perhaps an-Nubhani saw himself as a

modern Bedouin with the more worthy cause. This school of thought provides the rationale for bin-Laden's actions: living a simple lifestyle in Afhgan caves instead of using his wealth to live comfortably in an effort to claim *asabiya* and appeal to the modern Arab masses. Still, even an-Nubhani's thinking allows for an election of a council of ministers and admits the Caliph is not meant to be a dictator or saint.⁶⁶

Jadaane closes with a revivalist argument that more closely resembles the earlier philosophies of al-Afghani and al-Tahtawi, as outlined by Professor Abd al-Hamid Mutawalli (Egypt, 1977). Islam is not a state, but contains a general basis for a ruling system in the state. The Quran does not outline an actual form of government, and the Caliphate is not a principle of government; it is merely one form that is not considered possible in our time. The Quran does, however, give general guidelines for a government system. Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah and Muhammad Amarah (1973) agree with Mutawalli. "Questions of government are left by God's authority to man and his commitment to public good."⁶⁷ The state is national in nature and should be committed to Sharia, but legislation in the state is left to the community of men. There needs to be a separation of religious and civil life, and the community should choose its head of state according to its own circumstances.

This idea leads away from Arab nationalism and supports more democratic ideals. Elections are prescribed as the best way to ensure stability. The main emphasis behind this school of thought is that the Quran laid out guidelines for a government system and God delegated man to work out the details. This alternative then, according to Jadaane, should be more acceptable

to Muslims because it avoids the “extremes of temporal radicalism,” as proposed in the first school calling for a return to a Caliph-led state, and it “saves Islam from slipping into the labyrinth of adventurous experiments.”⁶⁸ He concludes with criticism directed towards the radicals: the “shortcut preferred by our ideal desires may not be the best way to reach ‘the cursed tree’ and climb it.”⁶⁹ Such revivalist reforms based upon Islam have greater promise of ensuring stability and improving conditions in the Middle East. They allow for the participation of the community in the governmental decisionmaking process, and this is the best way to alleviate the frustrations of the masses.

Let us now turn our discussion to western colonialism and how it interfered with traditional Islamic development and alienated the Arabs against the West. This alienation has made it more difficult for western-style democracy to flourish in the region, but still, the West influenced the various sub-regions and contributed to the development of states currently existing on the Middle Eastern map. Also, by introducing the concept of democracy, many Islamic reformers have found parallels in Islamic concepts from the Quran mentioned in the next section of this paper.

Colonialism in the Middle East and the Introduction to Democracy

Westernization in the Middle East began during the time of the earlier mentioned Tanzimat reforms in the nineteenth century which coincided with the subjugation of regions lost by the Ottomans. Over time, most of North Africa was conquered by the French. The Italians conquered Libya after a twenty-year effort in the early twentieth century. The British ended up in control of

Egypt in 1880, and after World War I and the final collapse of Ottoman Turkey, they split control over the North Arabian Peninsula and the adjoining Levant with the French. With the Russians, the British divided spheres of influence in Iran as well. Coastal regions, Yemen and Oman, as well as the small Gulf Sheikdoms also fell under British influence. Only the Central Arabian Peninsula remained independent where the state of Saudi Arabia emerged.

Western domination continued in most of the Middle East until well after the Second World War. Colonial policy generally skewed development within the region. Owen asserts that the West worked to “divide and rule.” For example, the French created an Alawi mini-state in Syria and carved out Lebanon as a separate Maronite state. Furthermore, trade was regulated to the benefit of the colonizing state, and contracts and concessions went to foreign colonials rather than Arab nationals. No central banks were established, and tariffs were forbidden.⁷⁰ Yet, colonization accelerated social change in the region. Job creation moved people from old village communities to the cities and introduced them to political activity.⁷¹ Arab national leaders became important political actors as states became more centralized. At first, the king or leader could be coerced to support the colonial position and provide continuity and a method of dismissing popularly elected governments trying to achieve greater autonomy through nationalist movements. Over time, however, these same leaders could also become aware of their growing power and lead the nationalist movements themselves. Such was the case of King Hussein of Jordan. Others were overthrown because of their close alliance with the colonists and did not survive long after

Talbot—Arab Perception and Consensus

independence, as in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Iraq.⁷²

Independence came gradually to the region, but economic and political dependence continued for some time (and still exists in some regions).

In the 1950s Nasser led a revolt in Egypt which eventually turned into a Pan-Arab movement with a goal to reunify the lost Arab supra-state. His socialist ideologies promised improvement in providing the basic necessities of life, eradication of the injustices of imperialism, and establishing a “sound democratic society.”⁷³ Interestingly, Nasser’s movement was not Islamist in nature (nor was it a democracy) and in fact sought a secular socialist path, considering Islam only as a part of Egypt’s heritage. Yet, his military success in obtaining control of the Suez Canal was perceived as an Arab victory over western colonialism. He was revered throughout the Arab world for his ideals even though Islam was not central to his ideology. Other socialist regimes also came to power during this period—the Baath in Syria and Iraq, the FLN in Algeria—and competing with Nasser, they also sought an Arab union. Within Egypt, however, the Muslim Brotherhood eventually rose up against Nasser because of his secularism. The Brotherhood’s dissent led to increased government control over mosques, religious schools, and public utilities. As the government became more and more centralized, it was viewed as more and more responsible for the problems of society, and Islamic organizations like the Brotherhood gained popular support. The same thing occurred in other secular states, and populations viewed their leaders as replacements to the western colonial powers who had borrowed and adopted western ways.⁷⁴

This culminated in the growth of Islamist movements in the 1970s and 80s which continues to this day.

What is most interesting about the end of colonialism is that nearly all the regimes that arose to replace western masters turned out to be authoritarian. Just as Khaldun's theory predicted, a new "royal authority" would arise to replace the corruption of the turned-sedentary predecessor. Unfortunately, most of the replacement royal authorities—current Middle Eastern rulers—are also corrupt. Evidence of this is revealed in Khashan's survey which also provides government satisfaction ratings. Well over 90 percent of the Levant Arabs are either "unhappy" or "very unhappy" with their governments. Moreover, when asked whether "the ruling elite . . . work for the best interest[s] of the people," 62 percent "strongly disagree" and a further 26 percent "disagree," which means a total of 88 percent of respondents don't really trust their governments. Sixty-eight percent call for government reform, and 23 percent expressed a desire to actually overthrow their governments.⁷⁵ Esposito maintains that the autocratic governments are less interested in establishing political legitimacy than in perpetuating authoritarian rule.⁷⁶ Lacking legitimacy, they have been challenged by the only legitimate force left in Muslim society: Islam. This is why there is so much power behind the Islamist movements. This power led to the Iranian revolution in 1979, but it was taken over by extremist clerics who have also turned out to be authoritarian, repressive rulers. Unfortunately, many Islamists believe their current rulers use western-style governments to suppress them and continue to fail to provide for their needs. In reality, it is a loyal police force and military that keeps the so called "western front" intact. But

Talbot—Arab Perception and Consensus

the revivalists know better. They understand that the Middle Eastern regimes are neither democratic nor western in nature, but have simply used outdated bureaucratic authoritarian forms of government which have since been abandoned in the West. It is the revivalist philosophy which offers the most hope for reform in the name of Islam.

The Quran contains the concepts of *shura* (consultation), *ijma* (consensus), and *Maslah* (public interest).⁷⁷ A traditional Arab tribal leader was not customarily given license to rule arbitrarily; he would normally consult with the *majlis* (tribal council). In theory, this meant the ruler was held accountable by the tribal council, and in fact, selection of a new tribal leader was subject to this council's approval. His position was not necessarily hereditary. This suggests that a democratic-like system of restraint was in place among the Bedouin because the tribal leader was to use consultation of the *majlis* to reach consensus in the name of the public good.⁷⁸

It must be noted that democracy does not necessarily mean the “accountability of elected officials by means of regular elections where all citizens can vote. This [typical western form] can be termed ‘electoralism.’”⁷⁹ A conference held at the US Institute of Peace considered the topic of Democracy and Islam, and noted that electoralism requires a highly developed and educated society and a political culture that supports tolerance and compromise. These values may not exist throughout the Middle East and thus make electoral, western-style democracy very difficult to achieve. Yet, there is a demand for greater participation in politics with the rising discontent attributed to poor socioeconomic performance, and as noted above, this

demand is justified in the precepts of the Quran. Perhaps public dissatisfaction will lead to “hybrid regimes” in the Middle East, which conferees defined as a mixture of democratic institutions and practices with some persisting patterns of authoritarianism.⁸⁰

A modern example of a hybrid regime is Jordan. The late King Hussein established a policy of “inclusion.”⁸¹ This meant that the Islamic movement was brought in and allowed to participate in the government rather than being repressed as it has been elsewhere. This inclusion forced the King to walk a fine line during the Gulf War because of popular support for Saddam Hussein and his stand against the West, even though the King likely preferred to support the coalition against Iraq. By not intervening nor dissolving parliament during this crisis, he added a great amount of credibility to his regime. In fact, during the 1993 elections the Islamists lost a share of the seats they had originally gained in the first elections of a few years earlier. Still, Ambassador Odeh of Jordan claims that the Islamists play an important opposition role in the government and that their concerns have been “effectively channeled to a democratic political institution.”⁸² He further states

In the Arab world, it’s wrong to judge democracy by western criteria. Comparing western democracy with Islamic democracy is like comparing silver with gold. In the Arab world, I believe, a synthetic version of democracy will emerge, a democracy that fits in our culture.⁸³

More recently, Bahrain has also initiated democratic reforms along the lines of a hybrid regime, still under the monarch who has now declared himself a King. He has recently released political prisoners and held parliamentary elections in which he allowed men and women, Shia and Sunni to vote. The new King

has even emptied the prisons of political detainees and meets regularly with a leading Shia cleric and major opposition figure who had been jailed by his father.⁸⁴

It is interesting to note that other regimes that have prevented democratic reform, such as Algeria, have a lot more problems than Jordan or Bahrain. In Algeria, Islamists sought reform through the ballot box but were stopped by the military, fearing an authoritarian Islamist takeover. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) had arisen in the 1980s in opposition to the single party government organization, FLN. It organized using Islamic institutions, schools, and mosques, and during the 1991 elections, when finally allowed to run nationally, FIS won 47 percent of the vote. Second round runoff elections scheduled for January 1992 were canceled by the military. Robin Wright asserts that FIS was not to be feared. Even though the party would have dominated the parliament, the president would have had two years with veto power to counter any attempts to radically change the constitution. This would have allowed ample time to develop compromise positions between the opposing groups.⁸⁵ It is also interesting to note that in the first local elections held in 1990, FIS had a million more votes than in the 1991 parliamentary elections.⁸⁶ Perhaps they, like the Brotherhood in Jordan, would have lost some of their support, once in power, and ceased to be such a threat to the FLN. It is too bad that we will never know what the outcome might have been. Instead, civil war erupted between the Islamists and the government, and now Islam is seen as the most cohesive and pro-democratic force in Algeria.⁸⁷

To sum up, western colonization alienated the Middle East against the West and its governmental forms, but most of this

alienation is due to the misuse of those forms by current, illegitimate regimes. The call for reform is not so much alienation against the West as it is alienation against the authoritarian regimes currently in power in most Middle Eastern states. Many of these governments profess democracy, but run unopposed in their elections under a system of bureaucratic authoritarianism. In Algeria, this is best highlighted by the ruling regime that allowed democratic reform, but then balked when it saw results requiring it to share power with the Islamic opposition. Quranic interpretation shows that democratic principles and Islam are compatible. Modern revivalists realizing this will call for democratic reforms to rescue their societies from corruption. Such corruption has arisen from sedentary regimes that have maintained power far too long.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The overall aim of US policy should focus upon the creation of peaceful transition opportunities to move Arab governments toward Islamic revivalist reforms. All other foreign policy goals should support this effort. Revivalists offer the best means of bringing legitimacy to government, of creating greater consensus, and it is they who are most likely to overcome past perceived injustices and work with the West towards democratic and economic reform. To get there, I feel that the US must first turn up the pressure on corrupt Arab regimes in an effort to nudge them towards inclusion. Such efforts must remain consistent with US values, and governments showing such tendencies should be rewarded. Examples include Jordan and Bahrain as described herein, as well as Kuwait, Morocco, and Qatar. This push will also go a long way toward eradicating the “hypocrite factor” that

Talbot—Arab Perception and Consensus

has plagued the US due to its past support of corrupt, authoritarian, anti-democratic regimes. When Islamists see that the US no longer accepts corrupt governments at face value, they will more likely be accepting of US engagement in the region.⁸⁸

Interestingly, much of the current debate regarding Iraq is focused on what type of post-war government will be established to replace Saddam. Fouad Ajami has said that “A new war [against Iraq] should come with the promise that the United States is now on the side of reform. . . . America has not known or trusted the middle classes and the professionals in these lands. Rather, it has settled for relationships of convenience with the autocracies in the saddle.”⁸⁹ Iraq then, could serve as the catalyst for governmental reform in the Middle East. A new democratic government in Iraq will send a message to others in the region that the US is withdrawing its support from those that refuse to restructure their governments.

Second, going hand-in-hand with friendly pressure towards revivalist-style democratization is encouragement for economic reform. In a region prone to high birth rates and young populations, the need for job creation is extreme, and the lack of economic stratification has led to social problems (urban migration; unemployment; unequal distribution of food, land, capital, etc.) and severely deteriorating economic conditions. Economic incentives offered by the US and other western states should encourage economic and simultaneous democratic reform.

Third, the US must increase pressure on the Palestinians and the Israelis to move the Peace Process forward. This is a most essential element due to its role as the biggest problem area vis-à-vis perceptions of the US. Moreover, impending changes in Iraq

could provide a catalyst for reform among the Palestinians. After all, Saddam's defeat in the 1991 Gulf War cleared the way for the Madrid Conference and the eventual Oslo Peace Process. So the overthrow of Saddam this time around could also provide such an impetus. Doran suggests that the road to peace in Palestine may actually run through a Baghdad administration that cooperates with the US.⁹⁰ More importantly, solving the Palestinian-Israeli dispute would eliminate a major scapegoat Arab governments have long used to justify the lack of democratic and economic reforms. In addition, among Arabs, the Palestinians are the most educated, contain the best semblance of a middle class, and are thus the most ripe for democratic reform. Pressuring the Palestinian authority towards reform will not only create avenues for peace with Israel, but allow them to serve as an example of democratic/economic success to other Arabs.

Finally, the US must work in other ways to sell the image of America as a value-laden society that is not corrupt as portrayed in Hollywood stereotypes. By engaging the Islamic religious authorities to condemn terror and suicide as violations of Islam—convincing them of the need to “delegitimize the proposition that violence and conspiracy are to be used against any ‘enemy’ of Islam,”⁹¹—and by focusing an education campaign on values, Muslims might be convinced that the West (particularly the United States) is closer-aligned to their religious values than is realized on the “Arab street.” Discourse is particularly important to this endeavor, which is “about promoting a respectful, popular dialogue toward a more cooperative future. Traditional foreign policy approaches must now be supplemented by a global engagement that reflects the revolutionary changes of the

information revolution.”⁹² Increasing Arab awareness of religious as well as other human-rights oriented western values could help to improve understanding between Arabs and the United States. We need to convince them that we still deserve the label “people of the book.”⁹³ The short-lived Pentagon “Office of Strategic Influence” was set up for such a mission vis-à-vis the Middle East,⁹⁴ and we need to undertake such an effort regardless of the fate of that office. At the same time, the US must also engage the international community to ensure its support in dealing with this critical region. The case of Iraq is of particular concern, because removing Saddam unilaterally, or with only limited international support, will make it much more difficult to cooperatively rebuild the government in Baghdad and “win the peace.” Dialogue is crucial to this endeavor, and as mentioned before, Iraq could serve as a catalyst for reform throughout the entire region.

Conclusion

In the West, secularization has long preceded political reform. In the Middle East, secular reform led to socialist movements and authoritarian regimes that are now discredited and labeled corrupt western forms. A return to Islam is sought as a way to end government corruption. This return can take two paths: one is radical violence that most likely will simply replace one form of authoritarian corruption with another, as occurred in Iran; or the other is a revivalist path, one that allows a compromise between current regimes and Islamic movements with a more democratically-oriented solution. Islam is the only legitimate force capable of initiating the needed reform. But, it must come from democratic principles, reformist philosophy, and not from radicals who will only add to the turmoil. Peaceful transitions to

democracy like that now occurring in Jordan and Bahrain are much more likely to bring long term stability to the region than repression and revolution such as in the Iranian or Algerian cases.

There is hope for the future, but that hope lies in the ability of Middle Eastern governments to share power with Islamic revivalist movements and not simply suppress them in order to continue the royal authority of a corrupt, sedentary regime, simply buying time until eventual overthrow, only to repeat Khaldun's cycle and lead nowhere. In the West we can increase that hope by supporting democratic movements and not prejudging the outcome of perceived Islamic threats, and by discontinuing our support of corrupt, authoritarian regimes that no longer have the support of their people. In this way, we might be able to help the movements along and mediate between the revivalists and the regimes in their struggle to allocate power and develop Islamic versions of democracy.

NOTES

¹ Dr Ziad Asali (President of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee), "Arab-American Perceptions of US Policy toward the Middle East, *Middle East Policy* IX (June 2002): 34.

² Karen Armstrong, "Ghosts of Our Past," *Modern Maturity* (January/February 2002): 45.

³ Nejla Sammakia, "The Role of the Media After September 11," Paper presented at the International Meeting on Global Trends and Human Rights, Geneva, 10-12 January 2002, 6.

⁴ Joseph Farah, "Just What is Arab PR?" *Jerusalem Post*, 10 August 2001, 14.

⁵ Khashan's 1999 survey included Syrians, Lebanese, Jordanians, and Palestinians. Forty-five percent of those surveyed claimed the Palestinian question concerned the "Arab world" and 40 percent also claimed it as an "Islamic world" concern. See Hilal Khashan, "Arab Attitudes Toward Israel and Peace," *Policy Focus* #40 (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), 4,19.

⁶ Fawaz Turki, “Follies of American Exceptionalism,” *Arab News*. Online at www.arabnews.com.

⁷ Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1998), 49-66.

⁸ Bernard Lewis, “The Revolt of Islam,” *The New Yorker* (November 2001). Online at www.newyorker.com/printable/?fact/011119fa_FACT2. Accessed on 3 October 2002.

⁹ Turki.

¹⁰ Death stats reported by Hamza Hendawi, “Ordinary Arabs Join Ranks of Militants as their Governments Pursue Path of Negotiations,” *Associated Press Cairo*, 28 September 2002.

¹¹ As reported by Tony Blankley, “Arabian Storm Rising,” *Washington Times*, 14 November 2001, 19.

¹² James Dorsey, “US Publicity Efforts in Terror War Fall on Deaf Ears in Muslim Nations,” *Wall Street Journal*, 7 November 2001.

¹³ Kathy Kiely, “Extremist Voices Drown Out All Others in Mideast,” *USA Today*, 5 April 2002, 1.

¹⁴ “Once We Started Fighting Israel We Lost Democracy,” MEMRI #104, 20 June 2000. Online at <http://memri.org>. Accessed on 8 October 2002.

¹⁵ “Death Wish,” *Washington Post*, 4 April 2002, 16.

¹⁶ Hendawi.

¹⁷ “Terror in America Retrospective: A bin-Laden Special on Al-Jazeera Two Months Before September 11,” MEMRI #319, 21 December 2001. Online at <http://memri.org>. Accessed on 8 October 2002.

¹⁸ Fouad Ajami, “What the Muslim World is Watching,” *New York Times Magazine*, 18 November 2001.

¹⁹ Published in An Nahar, a Lebanese newspaper. See Ariel O’Sullivan, “Syrian Defense Minister Blames WTC Attacks on Israel,” *Jerusalem Post*, 19 October 2001, 1A.

²⁰ Among Pakistani respondents, 13 percent considered the story a rumor and another 16 percent thought it was baseless. Michael Dobbs, “Myths Over Attacks on US Swirl Through Islamic World,” *Washington Post*, 12 October 2001, A22.

²¹ O’Sullivan, 1A.

²² Sammakia, 7.

²³ Riad Abdelkarim, “PR Alone won’t win Arab, Muslim Hearts and Minds,” *Arab News*, 6 February 2002. Online at www.arabnews.com. Accessed on 24 April 2002.

²⁴ Lamia Lahoud, “Palestinians Demonstrate Against US Attacks,” *Jerusalem Post*, 14 October 2002, 3.

²⁵ Ahmad al-Rubei, writer for *Ashraq al-Awsat*, a London daily Arabic language newspaper, 14 January 2003. Reprinted in *GulfWire E-Newsletters*, 23 January 2003.

²⁶ Karen DeYoung and Walter Pincus, “US Hastens to Assess Pair of Iraq Findings,” *Washington Post*, 17 January 2003, 1.

²⁷ See Julia Preston, “Short of a ‘Smoking Gun,’ Allies Ask Why the Rush?” *New York Times*, 22 January 2003; and Bill Nichols, “Bush Lacks Votes in UN, Diplomats Say,” *USA Today*, 23 January 2003, 4.

²⁸ Michael R. Gordon, “Fighting Solo if Necessary,” *New York Times*, 23 January 2003, 1. President Bush reaffirmed this view during his State of the Union Address, stating that “the course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others.” Still, he also mentioned that the Secretary of State is scheduled to meet with UN Security Council officials to share intelligence on Iraq’s weapons programs, a move that is hoped to sway allies. President quoted in Michael R. Gordon, “Bush Says Hussein is Giving Aid to Terror,” *New York Times*, 29 January 2003, 1. See also Glenn Kessler and Karen DeYoung, “Powell to Brief UN Panel on Weapons Data,” *Washington Post*, 29 January 2003, 1.

²⁹ Jane Perlez, “In Search for Democracy, US is Rejected as a Guide,” *New York Times*, 28 September 2002.

³⁰ Jane Perlez, “Arab Leaders Glumly Brace for Inevitable War,” *New York Times*, 8 October 2002.

³¹ December 2003 survey by the Pew Research Center reported in Evan Osnos, “Moderate Arabs Shudder, Denounce US as Gulf Bully,” *Chicago Tribune*, 22 January 2003.

³² Quoted in Osnos.

³³ Quoted in Osnos.

³⁴ Visit took place during December 2002. See Edward S. Walker, “Gloomy Mood in Egypt and Saudi Arabia,” *Middle East Institute*

Perspective, 22 January 2003. Reprinted by *Gulfwire E-Newsletters*, 23 January 2003, 1.

³⁵ Ibid, 1-2.

³⁶ Graham E. Fuller, "The Future of Political Islam," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (March/April 2002): 56.

³⁷ Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1995), 385.

³⁸ Asali, 34.

³⁹ Ibid, 34.

⁴⁰ Bin-Laden claims that he fights the US for "the removal of the man-made laws that America has forced on its agents in the [Middle East] area so that this [Arab] nation could be ruled by the Book [Quran] that has been sent down by its Creator, Allah." Moreover, he said that "America will never dream of safety, until safety becomes a reality for us living in Palestine. . . . America won't be able to leave this ordeal unless it leaves the Arabian Peninsula, and it stops its involvement in Palestine, and in all the Islamic world. See Osama bin-Laden, interview with Tayseer Allouni, Kabul correspondent for Al Jazeera, 21 October 2001. Online at www.muslimthai.com/jihad-online/article.php?a=252. Accessed on 23 January 2003.

⁴¹ Brian Michael Jenkins, *Countering al Qaeda* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002), 3-4.

⁴² Giles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 300-301.

⁴³ James M. Dorsey, "US Publicity Efforts in Terror War Fall on Deaf Ears in Muslim Nations," *Wall Street Journal*, 7 November 2001.

⁴⁴ Jamal al-din al-Afghani (1838-1897) is a major Islamic scholar considered by many to be the father of Islamic modernist thought. His ideas (as well of those of his student, Muhammad Abdu) are outlined in Roy R. Andersen, et al, *Politics and Change in the Middle East* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 160-161.

⁴⁵ Support for this view can be found in "On the Struggle Against Corruption in the Arab Regimes," The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) # 411, 14 August 2002. Online at <http://memri.org>. Accessed on 8 October 2002.

⁴⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 47.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 47.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 91-122.

⁴⁹ Mubarak ran unopposed in Egyptian elections. Voters had the choice of voting yes or no for him, and everyone knew he would win. See Christopher Dickey, "Step Forward. Now Inch Back." *Newsweek*, 11 October 1993, 40.

⁵⁰ R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1985), 9-12.

⁵¹ Dilip Hiro *Holy Wars: The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 45.

⁵² Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16-17.

⁵³ Ibid, 21-31.

⁵⁴ Hiro, 46-47.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 49.

⁵⁶ Tereq and Jacqueline Ismael, *Government and Politics in Islam* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1985), 25-26.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 26-27, 30. Al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) was an Egyptian Imam who served as a Muslim missionary to France. He read many Western political works while in France and was influenced by the works of Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 34.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 30.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 28.

⁶¹ As quoted in Ismael, 31.

⁶² Ibid, 31.

⁶³ Hiro, 50.

⁶⁴ Fahmi Jadaane, "Notions of the State in Contemporary Arab-Islamic Writings," in G. Luciani, ed., *The Arab State*, 258.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 259.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 267-272.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 277.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 282.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 283.

⁷⁰ Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 17-19.

⁷¹ Ibid, 19.

⁷² Ibid, 20-21.

⁷³ John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 127.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 128-130.

⁷⁵ Khashan, 16-17.

⁷⁶ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 15.

⁷⁷ See Hiro, 45, and Mehdi Noorbaksh, "The Middle East, Islam and the United States: The Special Case of Iran," *Middle East Policy*, Vol II No 3, 86, for further discussion of these principles in relation to democracy.

⁷⁸ Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics: the Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 90.

⁷⁹ Timothy D. Sisk, *Islam and Democracy* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 19992), 8.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 8-9.

⁸¹ Ibid, 45.

⁸² Ibid, 47.

⁸³ Ibid, 47.

⁸⁴ Yaroslav Trofimov, "Bahrain's Bold Rebuff to its Islamic Rebels: Democracy and Rights," *Wall Street Journal*, 25 October 2001, A1.

⁸⁵ Sisk, 39.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 38.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 41.

⁸⁸ In a recent speech to the Jeddah Economic Forum, the Jordanian Prime Minister encouraged Arab governments to build open and democratic civil societies. See "Arabs Must Become More Democratic to be Competitive: Jordan PM," *AFP*, 19 January 2003. This is the type of thinking that should be encouraged and rewarded by US policymakers.

⁸⁹ Fouad Ajami, “Iraq and the Arabs Future,” *Foreign Affairs* 82 (January/February 2003): 5-6.

⁹⁰ Michael Scott Doran, “Palestine, Iraq, and American Strategy” *Foreign Affairs* 82 (January/February 2003): 22. It might also be said that cutting Saddam’s support to Palestinian suicide bombers would aid in calming relations between the Palestinians and Israelis.

⁹¹ Richard C. Hottelet, “How to Dissolve Terror at the Roots: Education,” *Christian Science Monitor* 10 January 2003, 11.

⁹² Jamie Frederic Metzl, “For a Digital Marshall Plan,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 March 2001, 9.

⁹³ This term is used in the Quran and names both Jews and Christians as “people of the book”—referring to the Old Testament, which is also scripture to Muslims.

⁹⁴ See “From Uncle Ben’s to Uncle Sam,” *The Economist*, 23 February 2002.

***ARAB PERCEPTIONS TOWARD US FOREIGN
POLICY: WHY PERCEPTIONS MATTER AND
WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE AMERICA'S
IMAGE IN THE ARAB WORLD***

MICHAEL B. MEYER

INTRODUCTION

“We Arabs know American foreign policy is biased in favor of the Israelis,”¹ remarked an Arab League official to the author in December 2001. Backing up his assertion, the official referenced Secretary of State Colin Powell’s November 2001 remarks on the “Larry King Live” television program. On that program, Powell stated, “We are pro-Israel.” The Arab League official’s remembrance of the Secretary’s comments is as significant, though, because he failed to recall Powell’s other comments during the very same television program. Immediately after Powell voiced America’s support for Israel in front of Larry King, the Secretary remarked, “But I’m also pro-humankind. And I am also pro-Palestinian, to the extent that they are human beings, to the extent that they have a desire to see their children grow up in peace.”² The Arab official’s recollection and his perception of Secretary Powell’s comments, even if not complete, is both telling and representative of what many—if not most—Arabs think about United States foreign policy. While Arabs might not objectively consider the whole spectrum of US relations with Arab states and organizations, when Arabs evaluate United States foreign policy toward their region, Powell’s supposed “pro-Israel” remarks only further confirm what a majority of the Arab world have thought for at least the past few years. Arabs believe that American foreign policy is unjust in its treatment of Arab states and peoples,

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

and that the United States is biased against Arabs and in favor of Israel.³

Addressing Arab perspectives on the cause of the current turmoil in the region, Shibley Telhami writes, “This is not about the objective reality of where the blame lies; it is about entrenched perceptions. The public in the Middle East blames the powers that be, and sees Israel as the most powerful state in the region, an occupier of Arab lands, and the United States as the anchor of that order.”⁴ Poor perceptions encourage outrage.

Anti-American resentment on the part of Arabs is not a new phenomenon. Christian Science Monitor writer Cameron Barr remarks, “The roots of this anger lie in US political manipulations in the region during the 1950s and 1960s. . . . As the world’s only superpower, the US is bound to make some people unhappy at least some of the time.”⁵ William Quandt, a Middle East expert and a former member of the National Security Council staff, notes that a portion of Arab resentment towards the US derives from America’s dominant role in the world. “On the one hand, everyone is awed by US power, but on the other, they distrust it. . . . There is a certain inevitability that Middle Easterners will view the United States with suspicion simply because it is the most powerful country in the world—quite apart from its policies.”⁶ Similarly, Dr. Shireen Hunter of the Center for Strategic and International Studies who specializes in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Islam, emphasizes the Arab world’s feeling of vulnerability vis-à-vis the West and more specifically the United States.⁷

Beyond traditional pockets of resentment toward the US on the part of some Arabs due to cultural rifts and due to jealousy

about America's status as a superpower, the past few years have witnessed a new kind and depth of virulent anti-Americanism spreading across the Middle East. Fouad Ajami, in a *Foreign Affairs* piece, draws attention to the “rancid anti-Americanism now evident in the Arab world,” and he remarks, “From one end of the Arab world to the other, the drumbeats of anti-Americanism have been steady.”⁸ Intense anti-US sentiment held by extremist groups was manifested in the attack on the World Trade Center in 1993, the attacks on US military forces in Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996, the attacks against the US embassies in Africa in 1998, the attack on the USS Cole in 2000, and most recently the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. While these reprehensible attacks were committed by extremists who are certainly not representative of Arabs as a whole, some of the very same issues that motivated the extremists to act also outrage Arab populations and anger Arab governments in the Middle East.

Examples of recurring themes that irritate the Arab masses are the US military presence in the Arabian Gulf and America's perceived ambiguous stand on promoting democracy in the Middle East. In a part of the world where history is seldom forgotten, secular and religious Arabs alike draw parallels between the US presence and influence in the region today and that of European crusaders centuries ago.⁹ In the spring of 2001, a Saudi Arabian Ambassador assigned to a European country pointedly asked the author, “When will the United States end its arrogance and withdraw its military forces from the Gulf?”¹⁰ While public details are sketchy, and officials on both the Saudi and US sides have intentionally played down the apparent rift and even sought to repair it in the summer of 2002. Since the fall of 2001, it

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

appears that elements of the Saudi royal family and government (generally one and the same) are growing increasingly wary of the US military presence in the Kingdom.¹¹ The US presence inside a fiercely proud and independent country that bills itself as the keeper of the two holy Islamic cities of Mecca and Medina¹² draws unwanted notice and criticism to the Islamic Saudi government from both non-religiously and religiously motivated Saudi societal elements. This opposition has on more than one occasion already waged violent demonstrations against the US and the Saudi governments, as was the case in the 1995 and 1996 bombings. In short, the US military presence in Saudi Arabia threatens the Saudi ruling family's legitimacy with many religiously-minded Saudis.

Another charge levied by Arabs against the US involves America espousing democracy and pluralism while supporting Arab regimes that regularly practice repression. Critics of US foreign policy claim America plays lip service to and selectively promotes democracy as it conveniently suits US strategic interests. “How can the US criticize the Iraqi government for being repressive but not America’s friend, Saudi Arabia? Saudi Arabia is one of the world’s most repressive societies,” remarked a Syrian doctor. Arabs charge that America supports regimes like Egypt and Saudi Arabia that promote the status quo and stability, allow the US use of military operating locations and airspace, ensure the US access to oil, and themselves crack down on popular Islamic and secular civic-minded movements.¹³

Beyond pockets of jealousy over the US being the world’s sole superpower, the resentment caused by the US military footprint in the region, and America’s questionable record for

supporting democracy in the Middle East, in the past decade two paramount issues associated with US foreign policy have particularly agitated Arabs from both private and public walks of life: America's handling of Iraq and America's position toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. These two issues have caused a large percentage of Arabs from every country in the Middle East, from every religious group, and from every social class to conclude that United States foreign policy toward the Arab world is unjust and grossly in favor of Israel, at the expense of the Arabs.¹⁴ This paper, covering in depth the two salient issues of America's involvement with Iraq and the Arab-Israeli conflict, explains from the Arab perspective why such a large percentage of Arabs believe United States foreign policy toward the Arab world as unjust and biased.

Due to America's reliance on Gulf oil, its military presence in the Arabian (also known as Persian) Gulf, its desire for stability in the Middle East, and because of America's historic role as the principal mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the United States is closely linked to the Arab world.¹⁵ While relationships between America and Arab governments and peoples are most often oriented around common interests, the foundations of relationships are built on perceptions. It is important that America and its policies are well-received in the Middle East—not because it is pleasant to be liked, but because negative perceptions equate to security risks for the US. It is in America's national interest to promote a positive image. Hatred breeds horrible acts of extremism and encourages terrorists who will target America and America's friends in the region. Disdain toward America in Arab lands will likely eventually force moderate Arab governments,

now friendly to the US, to distance themselves from the US in order to save their own privileged positions in society. Therefore, America must proactively pursue enhanced initiatives in the political, economic, diplomatic, and informational (public diplomacy) realms to improve its image in the eyes of Arabs.

IRAQ—“THE INNOCENT SUFFER”

In the eyes of many Arabs, Iraq is a country that has been damaged by aggressive American policies that have hurt the common people and hardly touch the regime of Saddam Hussein. In the late 1980s, Iraq and its capital, Baghdad, were considered particularly advanced amongst Arab countries. This is not surprising, considering Baghdad had been a major center of Arab culture and learning for centuries, and since its citizens were some of the most educated and well-trained people in the Arab world. Rick Francona, an American military officer who worked as a US intelligence liaison with the Iraqi military, visited Baghdad in 1988 and remarked that the city was “a fascinating, vibrant, almost electric place.” Francona, a well-traveled Air Force officer and specialist in Arab politics and language, also noted in 1988 that despite the Iraqi capital city having endured over seven years of war with Iran, “Baghdad remained a beautiful city” with “history, charm, and character,” and “Baghdadis were proud of their capital.”¹⁶

The feeling that Baghdad was a pearl and that Iraq was a model country for other Arab states to emulate was shared by Arab citizens from other Middle East states. A professional Syrian educated in economics and with familial ties to the Syrian government, who worked abroad in the Gulf remarked, “Iraq’s economic and social well-being was the envy of most Arabs.”¹⁷

Baghdad and Iraqi society have changed, however, since the Gulf War. The former pearl of the Arab world has become quite tarnished.

In the wake of the Gulf War and after over a decade of sanctions against Iraq, it is obvious from media images and from numerous sources that Saddam and his regime continue to live quite comfortably, while ordinary Iraqi citizens suffer. Syrians with family members in Iraq note that their relatives' lives are materially much worse than before sanctions, while Saddam continues to live in luxury, unchecked.¹⁸ Outside Iraq and in other Arab capital cities, the presence of Iraqi taxi drivers, selling cheaply made goods from their dilapidated cars, garners sympathy in the region for the Iraqi people.

The United States has placed responsibility for Iraq's economic demise in the 1990s squarely on the shoulders of Saddam Hussein, citing the Iraqi dictator's intransigence when dealing with the United Nations. Whether or not the Iraqi regime has thumbed its nose at the UN, people from across the Arab world lay blame for the drastic decline of the Iraqi people's living conditions at the feet of America. Arabs feel that common Iraqis are paying an intolerably disproportionate penalty for the acts of the Iraqi regime, especially considering the relative ineffectiveness of UN sanctions that fail to punish Saddam.¹⁹ In a December 2001 commentary, Arab journalist Ahmed Bouzid opined that sanctions have cost "the lives of half a million of our own children, devastating thus a whole generation of Iraqis, and reducing what was once far and ahead the most modern Arab country to a backward nation barely able to subsist."²⁰ Arab writer and Professor Kamil Mahdi likewise writes, "The

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

consequences of such a catastrophe will be with Iraq and the rest of the region for generations to come.”²¹ Arabs argue that the resentment caused over America’s hard-line stance that damages Iraqi society will taint Arab, and particularly Iraqi, impressions of US policies for years to come.²²

Some Arabs are puzzled why US foreign policies continue to target Iraq in such a harsh fashion, especially when Iraq and the US once cooperated rather closely in the Middle East. Arabs are quick to point out that the United States actively supported Saddam Hussein during the 1980s, when Iraq opposed Iran during the Iran-Iraq War.²³

During the 1980s and just preceding the Gulf War, argue Arabs, “America’s Saddam” was every bit as much a dictator as he was in the late 1990s and into the next decade.²⁴ The fact that Saddam has been ironfisted during his rule in Baghdad is not a matter of contention between Americans and Arabs. Francona noticed the oppressive security environment in Baghdad in 1988, when Saddam was America’s man in the Gulf, and wrote “Government control was evident everywhere.”²⁵

Arabs point out that Saddam’s tough rule and treatment of Iraq’s people is not an aberration for the way Iraqi leaders have dealt with their people over the course of that country’s history.²⁶ So it is not surprising that Arabs note that an Iraq and Middle East with or without Saddam is tolerable. One Arab wrote, “Iraqis will be content to live under Saddam as they have for two decades before the sanctions.”²⁷ Some Arabs have argued that it would be better for US foreign policy—and perhaps safer for the region in light of ongoing Iranian ambitions—for America to work with Saddam instead of against him. Along the same lines, Arabs point

out that some of America's key Arab government allies, particularly Saudi Arabia, are no more benevolent or democratic than Saddam when dealing with internal dissent.²⁸

In the wake of the Gulf War and after a decade of sanctions, Arabs argue that Saddam no longer possesses a credible military threat to countries aligned with the US and to American interests in the region. They draw attention to the fact that America still seeks to degrade the Iraqi military threat, which was expanded mostly to fight the same enemy that America opposed during the 1980s—Iran. Meanwhile, Arabs are quick to point out America's own close ally and recipient of billions of dollars of US military assistance per year, Israel, employs American-made Apache helicopters and F-16 fighter aircraft against Palestinians without impunity in the Israeli-occupied territories. Additionally, while the US does not put pressure on Israel about its nuclear weapons program, Saddam is regularly lambasted for possessing weapons of mass destruction.²⁹ Palestinian intellectual Edward Said remarked in a spring 1998 editorial, “The media have been feeding the public a diet of stories about hidden weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which may have them for all I know, but which are neither a threat to anyone nor, in fact, have been proved by anyone to exist. The United States, reserving for itself the right to stand above all the norms of international behavior, is determined to strike if diplomacy does not work.”³⁰

Arabs in both the Mediterranean and the Arabian Gulf also express their concern that the “Iraq issue” has become a convenient excuse for the United States to maintain a constant and robust military presence in the Gulf. As the predominant powerbroker in the region, Arabs argue that America could have

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

easily disposed of Saddam during or immediately after the Gulf War if the US had truly desired. A Gulf official remarked that a very high percentage of Arabs believe the US is merely playing a “game” with Saddam and that America will not force the Iraqi leader out of power, because that could spell the end of America’s desired hegemony in the Gulf.³¹

As a tangible indicator of Arab discontent with US military action in the Middle East against Iraq, frustration over OPERATION DESERT FOX in mid-December 1998³² resulted in anti-American protests in Arab and Muslim countries.³³ Some of them became very violent, as was the case on 19 December in Damascus. On that day, a crowd of thousands pelted the US Embassy in downtown Damascus with stones and ransacked the residence of the American Ambassador. While it can be argued that rapidly quelling the riots was beyond the capability of the Syrian security services, American diplomats in Damascus felt that the Syrian government was delivering an indirect message to the American government by permitting the outpouring of emotion to get out of hand.³⁴ Very few public events, particularly protests, are truly spontaneous in a country known for its pervasive security environment. Adding more credibility to the theory that the Syrian government turned a blind eye in the early stages of the attack is the fact that the American embassy is located in the same neighborhood that is heavily patrolled by plainclothes Syrian presidential security guards.³⁵ It is probably no coincidence the violence took place at the same time that the Syrian government was beginning to restore formal economic relations with Baghdad.

In summary, Arab journalist Ahmed Bouzid's plea regarding Iraq rings true with both Arab populations and elites throughout the Middle East when he writes, "Why do Americans hate us [Arabs] so much that they would insist on imposing a decade-long embargo that has done nothing but ensure the misery of ordinary civilians?"³⁶ Arabs uniformly hope what they see as America's cruel and hypocritical vendetta against Iraq will come to an end.

THE ARAB-ISRAELI CRISIS—THE SEMINAL ISSUE

"Regarding America's foreign policy toward the Arabs, we don't actually expect the US to be one hundred percent unbiased, but we do wish the US was just ten percent unbiased."³⁷ This comment by a prominent Syrian businessman with very strong links to the Syrian government accurately highlights an opinion that has strongly resonated for years throughout the Middle East. In fact, what is seen as America's unjust approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict is the most frequently voiced issue unfavorably tainting Arab opinion of the United States. Even before the violent intifada erupted in late 2000, Arabs were already very aggravated by what they labeled as a definite American bias toward Israel and against the Arabs. Arabs see Israeli influence in the US government as pervasive at all levels, including within the legislative and executive branches. A journalist writing in a Saudi newspaper commented in a fall 2000 article, "Israel still has the Congress on its side, which always echoes the Israeli position," and "Washington must start to look at the area with a just perspective."³⁸

Because of their proximity to Israel and because Israel occupies land once belonging to them, citizens of Syria and Lebanon, perhaps more than any other people from sovereign

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

Arab states, feel they have suffered at the expense of unbalanced, and even almost unbridled, US support for Israel.³⁹ From 1999 to 2001, hundreds of government and private Syrians in both official and unofficial forums fervently expressed their opinion to the author that the US has intentionally stacked the cards in the region in favor of Israel and against the Arab states. An educated, professional Jordanian citizen married to a Syrian and living in Damascus commented to the author, “I think that US foreign policy toward the Middle East has always been biased toward Israel. I don’t understand what the US gets from supporting Israel at the expense of abandoning the Arabs.”⁴⁰

Very senior-level Syrian military officers regularly lectured American military attaches, both in public speeches and in private conversations, at Syrian military-sponsored dinners in 2000 and 2001 about the “inherent unevenness and inconsistencies” in US foreign policy toward the Arab countries. Several Syrian generals bluntly stated that it is not in America’s strategic interest, especially since the Arabs possess such great oil reserves, to back Israel—a nation of only seventeen million people—at the expense of the Arab states with a composite population of about three hundred million. Astute Syrians pointed out to the author that several prominent US officials, including Secretary of State George Marshall, opposed the US recognizing Israel in 1948 for fear of damaging relations with Arab states.⁴¹

In the late 1990s and into the next decade, many Syrians attributed what they viewed as anti-Arab policies to the fact that prominent Jewish persons held important positions in the Clinton Administration.⁴² This opinion was echoed during a March 2001 US Air War College trip to Damascus, when Syrian Defense

Minister Mustafa Talas lectured US military officer delegates that the Syrians had heard that President Clinton “loved our people” but several key cabinet posts were held by Jews. Talas expressed his belief that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had been openly working for the Jews.⁴³ Most American official visitors to Syria and diplomats accredited to Damascus are regularly subjected to rhetoric about perceived American bias against the Arabs and in favor of the Israelis from the Syrians.

Talas’ verbal backlash to the 2001 Air War College delegation can be partially attributed to the collapse of Syrian trust and what Syrians deemed as false hope they placed in the George H. W. Bush and Clinton administrations. Because of President George H. W. Bush’s and Secretary of State James Baker’s efforts to closely cooperate with the Arabs, especially during the Gulf War, Syrians and Arabs held those former officials in high esteem. Arabs believed the first Bush was more inclined to be objective with Arabs than were previous American administrations. Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad took a risk and signed on to the coalition against Iraq by contributing troops during the Gulf War. While Iraq had been a rival to Syria, on many levels, Hafiz al-Asad’s standing with America in 1990-1991 in the Gulf was extremely controversial with his public. One Syrian doctor remarked, “Just remember us siding with the coalition forces during the Second Gulf War, while the public opinion was against it.”⁴⁴

Several Syrians told the author that Bush’s, and America’s, credibility was boosted in the Arab world when, in 1992, Bush attached strict conditions to Israel for loan guarantees meant for new Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories. Most Arabs and a large portion of the international community interpret the

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

establishment of new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza strip as violations of international law under UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Bush's delay in loan guarantees angered Israel.⁴⁵ In the eyes of the Arabs, Bush had the courage to stand up to Israel and, generally, had even-handedly dealt with the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁴⁶

Just a few years later, Syrians were optimistic that Clinton could convince Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, a seemingly more reasonable man than Barak's predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu, to negotiate land for peace, as was called for under the Madrid Peace Process formula.⁴⁷ In the end, and in the eyes of the Syrians, Clinton failed.⁴⁸ The ultimate culmination point of Syrian disappointment with the past administration came at the March 2000 Geneva Summit between Presidents Asad and Clinton. In the lead-up to the summit, Clinton reportedly promised the Syrian president "good news," and the ailing Asad traveled to Switzerland to accept what he hoped would be a promising offer from the Americans and Israelis. Asad believed that Barak was finally ready to propose Israel's complete withdrawal from lands Israel occupied on the Golan Heights, up to the 4 June 1967 line. This was reasonable, since former Prime Minister Rabin, by many accounts, had already quietly made this promise to Asad in 1994, before Rabin's untimely assassination in 1995.

However, as the 1967 "border" was never formally demarcated, the precise location of that line is difficult to ascertain. The border was merely a line which Syrian tanks guarded before Israel launched pre-emptive attacks against the Arabs in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. In the Syrian mind that

border touched Lake Tiberias (also known as the Sea of Galilee) on the northern part of the lake and then ran through the middle of the lake, or at a minimum touched the lake on the east of the body of water. At Geneva, Barak, through Clinton, proposed that the Israelis control not only all of Lake Tiberias' waters, but also maintain a small strip of land for security on the eastern portion of the lake. Therefore, the Syrians would lose complete control over the shoreline and any right to water.⁴⁹

When they heard nothing new from Clinton regarding the Israeli position, Asad and the Syrians balked, and they left Geneva embittered. The Syrian/Lebanese-Israeli track of the peace process effectively died. In what was seen as a public insult to the Syrians, Clinton officials charged that Asad had been inflexible, and the ball was in the Syrian President's court. Syrian citizens angrily shot back that the US diplomatic effort was amateurish and that Clinton never should have summoned Asad to Geneva without offering something new.⁵⁰ Hafiz al-Asad, who involved Syrian in the peace process since 1991 and who most Syrians argue really did want an "honorable" peace, died in June 2000 and was succeeded by his son, Bashar.

Beyond the Syrian frustration with what they perceive as America failing to deliver a just solution regarding the return of historic, now Israeli-occupied Arab lands, Syrians are also incensed over the US condemning Syria for that country's support to what it considers "liberation" groups. Syrians are angry that backing for Palestinian groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and for Hizballah has landed Syria on the US State Department's list of states that sponsor terrorism. Syrian officials and citizens argue that Syria supports popular

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

movements that merely seek to end the Israeli occupation of historic Arab lands. After all, runs the Syrian argument, how can such organizations which maintain offices in Damascus and funnel weapons to “freedom fighters,” be considered terrorists if they strive to attain what is called for in United Nations Resolutions 242, 338, and 425—return of traditionally Arab-controlled lands occupied by Israel? America and its coalition partners fought in 1991, after all, to restore land to Kuwait from Iraq, citing UN resolutions as justification for action. One frustrated Syrian appealed to the author, “They [Israel and the United States] call us terrorists, and expect us to sit and watch them [Israel] occupying our land and humiliating our people.”⁵¹

In reference to Arab forces seeking an end to Israel’s occupation of Arab lands, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara’ had this to say to the UN General Assembly in the Fall of 2001: “Syria was the first country to call in 1985 for convening an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations to define terrorism and to differentiate it from the struggle of peoples for national liberation. Israel invented new types of terrorist practices in order to continue its occupation of Arab territories. . . . How could anyone fail to differentiate between terror and resistance? Anyone who would like to target terrorism in our region must target the Israeli terrorism first and foremost, because what Israel does is the utmost form of terrorism that is absolutely shorn of human feeling.”⁵² Syrians and, for that matter, Arabs in general view American moves to condemn Arab attempts to gain back lands that once belonged to them as hypocritical.

Just a month after the Foreign Minister’s appeal in the UN, the Syrian Ambassador to the United States reaffirmed the Syrian

and Arab positions on peace and terrorism, stating, “Syria seeks a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in accordance with UN resolutions.” Furthermore, “Syria has no connection with terrorism; Syria seeks to uproot terrorism in all its forms”—a direct reference to Israel.⁵³ Arabs across the Middle East emphatically charge the US with holding double standards for claiming Arab “liberation” groups are terrorists, while Israel continues to brutally treat Arabs in lands where they once ruled.

Perhaps the “liberation” organization that evokes the most pride from Arabs across the Middle East is Hizballah in Lebanon. This group is supported by not only Iran, but also by Syria; and it serves as one of the few remaining pressure points Syria can apply against Israel. Arabs credit Hizballah’s military efforts in the 1980s and 1990s as having been the impetus for Israel’s withdrawal from south Lebanon in the spring of 2000. Most Syrians openly engage in hero worship when they speak about Hizballah’s accomplishments against the Israelis in southern Lebanon, and they note that Hizballah has succeeded where most other Arab organizations have failed at forcing Israelis to concede territories back to Arabs.⁵⁴ During a Spring 2001 trip the author took with Syrians through Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley, several well-to-do Syrians—most of whom had occasional political contacts with Syrian government officials in Damascus—eagerly donated cash along the road to youths waving Hizballah flags and collecting money for the group. During his two years in Damascus, the author observed no other group that attracted the same level of admiration on the part of private Syrian citizens.⁵⁵

Hizballah’s continued actions against Israeli occupation forces in the Sheba Farms area is controversial but continues to

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

receive strong support from Syrians.⁵⁶ The UN certified Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon complete in 2000, in accordance with UN Resolution 425. In a move backed by the US, Sheba was deemed by the UN not part of Israeli-occupied Lebanon, but instead, part of Israeli-occupied Syria, which is covered under UN Resolution 242. While Israel is no longer technically violating the UN resolutions applying to Lebanon, Arabs still claim Sheba as part of Lebanon, and thus in their eyes, Hizballah is warranted to continue attacks in the area. Syrians do not so easily distinguish between Israeli occupation of Lebanon and Israeli occupation of Syria, and they are prepared to continue the fight. Syrian Ambassador Zoubi predicted, "As long as Israel is not in compliance with UN resolutions, Hizballah will remain active."⁵⁷

During Prime Minister Ehud Barak's time in office as Israel's Prime Minister, Syrian perception of US foreign policy turned from bad to abysmal. In the spring of 1999, after Barak's victory and assumption of office, Syrians believed that a door for peace between Arabs and Israel might finally be opening after the difficult Netanyahu years. Geneva, however, slammed that door shut, only further confirming to Syrians that the US could not be trusted as an honest broker.⁵⁸ Public perception of America in Syria, and across the Arab world, took a nose dive when the Palestinians' situation in the Occupied Territories became grave in late 2000, a subject to be covered in-depth in the next chapter.

Syria's Palestinian neighbors to the south are perhaps even less impressed than Syrians with America's record for acting as an honest broker in America's desire to assist in delivering an equitable peace to the Middle East. Palestinians optimistically

went into the Oslo Peace Talks in the early 1990s. Sara Roy notes that the Palestinians sought “their own state, which must consist of a contiguous West Bank and Gaza, a connection between them, and only minor adjustments to 1967 borders.”⁵⁹ Prior to the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Arab control extended over East Jerusalem, including Muslim holy sites.⁶⁰ By the late 1990s, though, Palestinian and Arab hopes were dashed. Arabs believe that the much-touted, American-supported Oslo agreements were more about “process” and Israeli stalling—while Israel expanded Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories—than about attaining actual peace and prosperity for both parties. In short, the Arab argument goes, the Palestinians had been cruelly manipulated by the Israelis and their American ally, and Oslo created a diversion on Israel’s path to gobbling up more and more Palestinian land and rights.⁶¹

Palestinian intellectual Edward Said’s words in a 1998 essay, regarding America’s role as a negotiator in the peace process, accurately represented Arab opinion: “It [the United States] can pretend that it can be all things to all parties; that pose has been shown for the miserable ruse that it has always been. The United States has also lost the support of even those Arab and Islamic states who are its supposed allies, so appallingly insensitive and hypocritical has its behavior been in coddling Israel and at the same time demanding compliance from the Arabs.”⁶²

In order to more clearly understand Arab perceptions relating to America’s involvement in the peace process, a brief overview of Palestinian attitudes towards the peace process and Oslo is warranted. Jerusalem Media and Communication Center public opinion poll results highlight growing Palestinian dissatisfaction

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

with what they believe have become increasingly fruitless efforts to deal with Israel. In December 1996, Palestinian support for the peace process was recorded at 78%, while support for Oslo stood at 75%. By December 2000, those numbers were 47% for the peace process and 39% in favor of Oslo. The poll's analyst remarked that Palestinians were relatively optimistic in 1996 because they had faith that the peace process and Oslo would “help them achieve their national aspiration of ending occupation and building an independent state.” After only a few years, though, Palestinian support greatly declined because of “the deteriorating political and economic conditions of Palestinians as a result of Israeli violations of Interim agreements, continued Israeli settlement activity and Palestinian land confiscation, closures and restriction of movement of Palestinians, and the fact that most aspects of Palestinian life remained under Israeli control.”⁶³

Under Oslo, life became more difficult rather than easier for Palestinians. Augustus Richard Norton notes “[Since Oslo], the quality of life has declined, especially as measured by per capita income, which has shrunk 20 percent in the West Bank . . . and 25 percent in Gaza. The comparable figure for Israel has increased . . . 11 to 15 times the Palestinian level. Put simply, peace did not produce an economic bonanza for the Palestinians.”⁶⁴ By the late 1990s, unemployment soared to approximately 20% in the West Bank and 30% in the Gaza Strip. Palestinians became increasing impoverished and desperate as Oslo “progressed.”⁶⁵

Under Oslo, Palestinian wages and the aggregate Palestinian economy declined as Israelis tried to prevent violent Arab acts of extremism by closing Palestinians out of Israeli-occupied areas

and out of Israel proper. What this meant is that Palestinians could not transit to and from their jobs, move freely from one Palestinian area to another, or even visit their holy sites in Jerusalem. Israel imposed 342 days of total closure on Palestinians in the Gaza strip and 291 days of total closure on the Palestinians in the West Bank from 1993 to 1996. Less stringent closure rules were applied on other days during those years.⁶⁶

Another serious bone of contention for Palestinians regarding the Oslo Peace Process has involved their lack of physical control over traditional Palestinian land. Under the Palestinian Authority, and as a desired outcome of Oslo in the 1990s, the Palestinians looked forward to the creation of a Palestinian state by 1998 in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Even if that had come to fruition, however, the West Bank and Gaza Strip only represented 22% of pre-1948, historic Palestine.⁶⁷ By mid-2000, though, the Palestinians had complete control over only 17.2% of the West Bank, and that land was not all located together. Instead, Israeli roads and settlements resulted in the Palestinian-controlled territory being carved up into small enclaves. Sara Roy notes Palestinian areas “were noncontiguous and remained isolated cantons separated by areas under complete jurisdiction of Israel.” So, when the Camp David II summit in July 2000, under the tutelage of President Clinton, failed to offer the Palestinians more than 90% of the West Bank, again broken up by Israeli roads and settlements, Palestinians and the entire Arab world were naturally frustrated.⁶⁸

A Palestinian negotiator, in a letter to US Congressional members, wrote that the Camp David proposal “fell far short of minimum requirements for a viable, independent Palestinian

state.” Under the proposal by Israeli Prime Minister Barak, the Israeli offer “would have made Palestine nothing more than Arab ‘Bantustans’ perpetually at the mercy of Israeli economic and military closures.”⁶⁹ By the summer of 2000, it was clear that Israel would not withdraw completely from the territories it occupied beginning in 1967. Additionally, Palestinians’ economic prospects were dim, and the Palestinians felt socially humiliated. It has been evident from the mass outpouring of Arab emotion, as regularly highlighted in the international press since the fall of 2000, that people from across the Arab world are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and have shared common frustration over Israeli and US policies.

ADDING FUEL TO THE FIRE—THE SECOND INTIFADA

Arab outpouring of emotion over the plight of the Palestinians has been expressed across the Arab world in the form of pro-Palestinian demonstrations and riots against Israel and the US since fall of 2000. The al-Aqsa, or second, intifada was born following Ariel Sharon’s controversial visit to the common site of the Temple Mount and the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem at the end of September 2000.⁷⁰ Sharon’s act of boldly forcing his way to the site with Israeli police escort into the area of Islam’s third holiest site added fuel to a fire that was bound to break out in the wake of what the Palestinians and Arabs already perceived was the end of the peace process.⁷¹ Large and sometimes violent demonstrations protesting Israeli and American policies toward the Palestinians occurred in several Arab capitals and cities in subsequent weeks, including Rabat, Cairo, Manama, Muscat, and Damascus.

Damascus was the site of particularly fierce outbursts aimed at America, as the Syrian regime and new President Bashar al-Asad were willing to allow Arab displeasure to be visibly displayed. Because there are no formal diplomatic relations between Syria and Israel, there is no Israeli Embassy in Damascus. Instead, the American Embassy, as a symbol of both Israeli and American policies in the mind of incensed Arabs, served as a symbolic target against which to vent frustration. On 4 October 2001, a crowd of approximately three thousand Palestinian and Syrian students, mostly in their twenties, rioted outside the walls and attacked the American embassy with large rocks and bricks. Embassy windows were broken, and one Syrian managed to scale the embassy wall and tear down the US flag from the top of the main building before being subdued by the Marine security guards.⁷²

Two days later on the first declared “Palestinian Day of Rage,” a hostile crowd of several thousand Palestinian young men from Palestinian refugee camps/neighborhoods in Damascus, along with Syrian young men, staged a particularly violent display against American interests. Demonstrators burned Israeli and American flags in the streets of Damascus. In an attempt to reach the embassy, rioters threw Molotov cocktails and bricks at Syrian riot police blocking their route. Policemen in and around the vicinity of the embassy responded to the crowd with tear gas and warning shots fired in the air. Syrian police bloodied scores of protesters as some were dragged away to custody, unconscious. Several Syrian policemen were also injured. For the next few weeks, additional violent demonstrations followed, although Syrian police protected the US Embassy, and rioters were repelled

at a greater distance from the building. As a signal to the US Ambassador and to United States diplomats, and as a means for allowing Syrians and Palestinians to vent their aggression, the Syrian government organized more peaceful protests in October 2000 in Damascus. These orchestrated demonstrations in the vicinity of the US embassy sometimes consisted of more than twenty thousand public sector workers, university students, and high school students ordered to march in the streets near the embassy. Demonstrators carried individuals in the air, covered in shrouds and symbolically representing dead Palestinians killed by Israelis in the Occupied Territories. Demonstrators also carried banners and large pictures of Palestinian children killed during fighting in Israel, and they shouted anti-US and anti-Israeli slogans while they burned American and Israeli flags. On a busy main street in Damascus, a giant poster of a Palestinian boy, Mohammed al-Dura, who was shot to death by Israeli forces while cowering at his father's side in the early stages of the intifada in Palestine, hung for weeks in the vicinity of several embassies and along the route to the American embassy. Without doubt, this poster was placed there with the approval of the Syrian government, since nothing appears on Syrian streets without regime approval.

The demonstrations against the US diplomatic mission in Damascus in the fall of 2000, which were either undoubtedly approved or ordered by the government—at least the less violent ones—expressed the sentiment of Arab peoples throughout the Middle East. While most in the Arab world did not go to the extremes exhibited by the rioters in Damascus, the hatred demonstrated and the excitement for striking out at something

American was a perfect manifestation of how many Arab citizens feel about the US after years of Palestinian suffering.

During the second intifada, Arabs have been particularly distraught with what they view as an Israeli hard-line approach to the Palestinians. They see this Israeli approach as directly backed and funded by the United States. They are also angered by America's willingness to prevent the international community from stepping in and stopping what they view as Israel's slaughter of Palestinian citizens, who have died at a rate about three times the rate of Israelis since the beginning of the violence. In addition, America's provision of large amounts of military aid and financial aid to Israel, versus much more conservative amounts for the Palestinians, has been a bone of contention with Arabs. Since the fall of 2000, Israel's employment of sophisticated US-origin military equipment against the lightly armed Palestinians has outraged Arabs. An official with the Kuwait Information Office, Dr. Shafeeq Ghabra, remarks that Arabs "notice that the Israelis are using American-made Apache helicopters and F-16s."⁷³ An academic at Cairo University vents, "What has it [the United States] done to stop Israeli acts of terror, which the US makes possible through supplies of state-of-the-art military hardware?"⁷⁴

Also frustrating to Arabs is what they view as American obstruction of UN efforts to create an impartial international monitoring force in the occupied territories. Twice in 2001—the latest of which was in mid-December—the US vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for international monitors to be sent to the West Bank and Gaza. The resolution in December 2001 was sponsored by the Arab countries Egypt and Tunisia, and it also called for a cessation of violence between Israel and the

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

Palestinians, as well as the resumption of peace talks between the two sides. A Palestinian UN official called the US action “unreasonable,” saying, “We are the little guys. We are the people under occupation, and it is our right and a duty to come to the body responsible for peace and security, to the United Nations.”⁷⁵ Between May 1990 and mid-December 2001, the US vetoed six Security Council resolutions related to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, further tainting US foreign policy in Arab eyes.

The Al-Aqsa intifada has also adversely affected America’s relations with the Gulf States. In the past few decades, these countries have not placed a large emphasis on the Arab-Israeli conflict as a theme in their strategic relations with the US. This is changing, though. An American expert with great insight into the Gulf is Dr. John Duke Anthony, President and CEO of the National Council on US-Arab Relations. In testimony delivered on 31 July 2001 before Congress, Anthony noted that the Palestinian issue has tainted US relations with the Gulf States. Before the House of Representatives he stated, “The simmering disappointment of GCC leaders at the way they see Washington as having treated Palestinian issues has accelerated considerably since the onset of the Al-Aqsa intifada. . . . They [GCC peoples] admit to a sense of growing pain in their hearts. Neither the elites nor rank-and-file in any of these countries is oblivious to the implications for domestic and regional stability that flow from the prevailing perception that the United States is anything but ‘even-handed’ or ‘honest,’ or an ‘honest broker,’ when it comes to the question of Palestine.”⁷⁶

Dr. Anthony's assertion that the Arab-Israeli conflict evokes deep-seated negative sentiment and is having unfavorable consequences in the way Gulf rulers and elites view the US is backed by observations of American officials. Colonel Bernard Dunn, US Defense Attaché to Saudi Arabia from 2000-2002, noted in December 2001 that, since the beginning of the second intifada, the Saudis have been upset with America's handling of the Palestinian-Israeli crisis, and this has hampered US-Saudi security cooperation.⁷⁷ Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Ryan Crocker, a former US ambassador to several Arab states, acknowledged also in December 2001 that the intifada has had a "corroding effect on American interests" throughout the Middle East.⁷⁸ During office calls with very senior Arab military officials attended by the author in the summer of 2002 in several Arab countries, several prominent officers opined that the Palestinian-Israeli situation must be solved prior to the US or a US-led coalition targeting Saddam Hussein.⁷⁹

Perhaps most damning is a January 2002 statement to the US from the Saudi Crown Prince himself: "I don't see the sense of justice and the sense of righteousness ordained by God Almighty in what is happening in the [Israeli-occupied, Arab] territories. When you look at your own nation [the United States] and how it was founded, the principles were justice, righteousness, equity, and concern for eliminating evil and decadence and corruption. . . . I have great concern about America's credibility and I care about how America is perceived. As friends and as your allies, we are very proud of our relationship with you. In the current environment, we find it very difficult to defend America, and so we keep our silence. Because to be frank with you, how

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

can we defend America?"⁸⁰ While most contempt for US foreign policy on the part of Arabs is held primarily by the common people in Middle Eastern societies, and not as much by the elites who send their children to America to study and who vacation in the US, there could easily come a day when Gulf officials can not ignore the voice from the expanding masses. "People power" may well significantly impinge on America's ability to maneuver in the Middle East and to project its interests in a region so vital to US national security interests.

CONCLUSIONS—IMPLICATIONS FOR US NATIONAL SECURITY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE AMERICA'S IMAGE IN ARAB EYES

Because of America's stance toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and because of its handling of Iraq during the past decade plus, both public and private Arab citizens' perception of US foreign policy is worse in late 2002 than perhaps at any previous time in history. Do Arab perceptions about American foreign policy really matter, though, as America navigates its course through the treacherous waters of Middle East politics and security? If so, what initiatives should the US pursue to improve its image in the eyes of the Arab world? This section concludes that Arab perceptions do matter and are important, since negative perceptions endanger American security interests in the region and on US soil. Additionally, the paper recommends that, in order to better its image in the Middle East, the US must modify its policies toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, increase financial aid, expand its diplomatic efforts, and more aggressively pursue a public diplomacy campaign.

It would seem that Arab governments and organizations might distance themselves from the US as Arab officials themselves and

particularly their populations become more suspect and even hateful of America and what it stands for in Arab eyes. By spring and summer of 2002, certain indicators hinted that the Arab states were at least somewhat distancing themselves from the US. For months, heavy criticism was heaped on the US in the Arabic press. In a concrete example of the results of strained ties between the US and Arab world, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Africa and the Middle East Molly Williamson remarked that America's composite trade with the Arab world was down by approximately twenty-five percent during the first six months of 2002, as compared with the first half of 2001.⁸¹

Widely reported rifts in US-Arab ties emerged when President George W. Bush suggested in the summer of 2002 that Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat must be removed before a viable Palestinian state could emerge. Regarding extensive talk of possible US or US-led military action against Iraq, the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Gulf governments cautioned restraint; they publicly announced that their territory could not be used to base US forces prepared to attack Iraq. On 7 August 2002, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Feisal publicly stated that Saudi Arabia could not be used as a US launching pad to attack Iraq. He emphasized this was Saudi Arabia's public and private positions.⁸²

Official Arab rhetoric, though, is often inconsistent with Arab actions. When it comes to Arab cooperation with the United States even the staunchest Arab critics have regularly found reason to work with America, despite dissatisfaction with American policies. Surprisingly, the same Syrian government that has been so critical of the US in recent years has cooperated with America since 11 September 2001 by sharing intelligence on

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

terrorist cells and groups. Syrian information given to the US apparently helped prevent an attack by extremists against American servicemen in the Gulf sometime in 2002.⁸³

In mid-September 2002, following months of a worsening trend in Saudi-US relations, in the wake of and Riyadh's claim that US military forces could not base out of the Kingdom in the event of an attack on Iraq, Saudi officials seemed to conduct an about face. Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Feisal noted that if the United Nations authorized force against Iraq, the United States could apparently stage military operations out of Saudi Arabia because "everyone is obliged to follow through."⁸⁴ Even lacking UN backing, Saudi will still likely follow the US lead to smite Saddam. Other Arab countries also changed course and refuted earlier statements which hinted that US forces attacking Saddam would not be welcome in their countries. Qatar's Foreign Minister Hamad bin al-Thani, in reference to potential US requests to base American military forces in Qatar remarked, "We always consider requests from our friends. We consider the United States our ally." Jordan, a country with close ties to both Iraq and to Palestinians, seemed to acquiesce to America, as well, when its Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher relayed, "Jordan has a strategic, political, and economic relationship with the United States, and certainly, Jordan will not jeopardize this relationship."⁸⁵

By late September, it seemed that negative Arabs opinion toward US foreign policy had ostensibly done little to actually create a fissure in government-to-government security relations between the US and Arab countries. At least with regard to the Gulf nations, US-Arab cooperation even expanded. Progress

included the continued construction of the joint Qatari-US airbase and a US air operations center at al-Udeid, photos of which appeared on Internet sites in the summer of 2002.⁸⁶ As part of a trip around the Gulf, and at a conference in Kuwait on 21 September 2002, the Commander of US Central Command, General Tommy Franks, remarked that US military forces in the Arabian Gulf have stepped up training with host militaries there. The day before, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister remarked that Kuwait would support action against Iraq, provided it had United Nations backing.⁸⁷

Facts like the ones above hardly indicate a freeze in official relations in the short term or even the more ominous “clash of civilizations” predicted by Samuel Huntington. In his book, Huntington notes, “The twentieth-century conflict between liberal democracy and Marxist-Leninism is only a fleeting and superficial historical phenomenon compared to the continuing and deeply conflictual relation between Islam and Christianity.”⁸⁸ Perhaps his comments are a bit premature when examining official US-Arab relations; however larger societal rifts could develop over time.

Ideological and emotional differences may exist between America and its Arab partners, especially over the Palestinian issue, but a very pragmatic symbiosis still dominates the current, official relationship. America and its allies require access to Gulf oil, and Arab states like Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates are unlikely to soon abandon the security umbrella provided by US military forces. America represents a shield for Gulf countries against Iran and Iraq. Because the US and the Arab world are so inextricably linked in the economic and security spheres, Arabs’ negative perceptions of

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

US foreign policy is unlikely to create a real chasm in official US-Arab relations during the immediate-to-intermediate term.

While official relations will continue generally unabated in the near future, and likely for at least the coming few decades, American officials would not be wise to disregard the dangers to US national security because of negative Arab perceptions of US foreign policy. The “Arab street,” or Arab populations in the Middle East from all socio-economic backgrounds, which many analysts regularly dismiss as irrelevant in Middle Eastern politics, often see relations with America quite different from their leaders. These disgruntled and marginalized individuals represent a growing pool of religious extremists or secular extremists driven by perceived injustice. Extremists pose a challenge to moderate Arab states’ long-term domestic stability. Additionally, extremists will threaten America by committing further terrorist acts against Americans and US facilities both overseas and within America’s borders.

Ominously, the number of disgruntled Arab citizens—the same group that is largely hostile toward US policies—is rapidly growing. Most Arab governments have either no plans or poorly developed plans for dealing with a glut of un- or underemployed young people. A third of Saudis of working age are unemployed, and more than half the population is under the age of twenty.⁸⁹ Egypt, a country of great strategic importance to the US because it controls the entry and exit of US naval ships through the Suez Canal and because most US military air traffic en route to the Arabian Gulf over flies its territory, is now struggling to dole out unimaginative jobs to its burgeoning population. Fewer public sector jobs—a traditional social welfare safety net—handed out

each year equates to less loyalty by lower class Egyptians for the Egyptian government.

One late morning in 1995 while in an Egyptian military building, the author woke up one of four young soldiers “guarding” the key to a bathroom door. One sleepy soldier opened the door to a bathroom for the author, which appeared safe enough without a lock. Egypt and other Arab government’s calculate that it is better to pay a soldier or public servant a salary of \$100 or less than have that same individual unemployed and on the street—a lucrative target for recruitment by Islamic opposition figures. In short, angry Arab populaces across the Middle East, which have been demonstrating against Israel and the US in larger numbers than those seen in several decades, represent a real threat to the stability of Arab governments friendly to the US. Over the long term, Arab internal intelligence and security organizations will have to be more oppressive to subvert citizens opposed to their governments continually siding with the US, or Arab officials will have to take their people’s opinions more into consideration when drafting their responses to US policies.

Arab popular scorn will undoubtedly motivate Arab extremists to continue to lash out at American interests. Each Israeli reprisal against Palestinians, especially ones employing American F-16 fighters or Apache helicopters, which attract only mild criticism by American administration officials unwilling to highlight the possible illegality of such Israeli action in terms of UN resolutions, further motivates Arab extremists to attack the US. American diplomats and American businesspersons will face increased risk of attack or kidnapping. Poor perceptions of the US in Arab countries hosting US forces will likely force the US

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

military presence—rather apparent to locals in some Middle East countries—to become and more isolated from Arab population centers, such as has been the case during the past decade in countries like Saudi Arabia. Force protection measures will become increasingly more crucial at US military forces, US embassies, and US business centers and compounds in the Middle East.

The fact that a large percentage of Arab citizens hold US policies in contempt is unlikely to change in the near future due to the current difficult conditions in the Middle East. Because of disdain generated by America's commitment to Israel as a special partner and because of differences between American and Arab positions over Iraq, Arab resentment is not likely to soon dissipate. However, there are several measures that the US can take to mitigate Arab perceptions of US foreign policy and even stem future contempt. Reducing the magnitude of Arabs' negative perceptions will take a more determined and sustained effort by the US government, which must employ the complete gamut of political, economic, diplomatic, and informational (public diplomacy) instruments of power.

Considering, again, the seminal issue in eyes of Arabs is the Arab-Israeli conflict, politically, the US would quiet millions of enraged Arab voices if the US would tenaciously and consistently push for an internationally-recognized Palestinian homeland, encompassing the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. As an admirable and courageous first step in the policy arena, President Bush and the United States called for the creation of a Palestinian state twice publicly in 2002. President Bush's administration is the first US administration to formally take such a stance. On 12

March 2002, the US put forth a Security Council resolution, which was passed 14-0, “affirming a vision” of a Palestinian state and calling for an end to the violence in Israel/Palestine.⁹⁰ Then, in another encouraging step, President Bush on 24 June unequivocally called for the creation of a Palestinian state. The President even criticized Israeli tactics toward the Palestinians, stating, “It is untenable for Palestinians to live in squalor and occupation.” He made references to the pre-1967 boundaries—those before Israeli occupation of traditional Arab lands—as a starting point for Israeli-Palestinian discussions “based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338, with Israeli withdrawal to secure and recognized borders.”⁹¹

Unfortunately, however, President Bush has marginalized Chairman Arafat in the US Administration’s vision for a future Palestinian government. While Arafat is despotic and corrupt, and probably should go, he was recognized by the US, under the previous administration, as the elected leader of the Palestinians. The US must find a way to civilly marginalize Arafat, so that another, more enlightened Palestinian leader can emerge, without allowing Israel to repeatedly attack his headquarters. The administration has wisely criticized such aggressive Israeli action against Arafat but hesitates to actually alienate or punish Israel. Additionally, while the US vehemently emphasizes Iraqi refusal to abide by UN resolutions, it fails to take concrete steps to punish or rebuke Israel for failing to adhere to UN prescriptions. Certainly a tall order, to genuinely improve its image in the Arab world, the United States must be willing to pressure the Israelis to return historic Arab territories back to the Arabs (that they held before 1967) for a Palestinian state, help broker a solution over how

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

Jerusalem can be equitably ruled or administered by both Israelis and Palestinians, and address the Palestinian refugee issue.

Finally, America must place as much priority on solving the Israeli-Palestinian morass as it does on pursuing Saddam Hussein. The US should not abandon its special relationship with Israel, but America should not allow Israel to steamroll the Palestinians, either.

Turning to the economic instrument of power, increased amounts of aid, properly accounted for once it is placed in foreign hands, must be granted to give the despondent members of struggling Arab societies hope of a better life. Instead of potentially seeing America as a rich, far-away land that is not concerned with the welfare of the world community, increasing amounts of American aid must be earmarked for less fortunate members of the international community. Financially assisting countries like Yemen, which is a hotbed for extremism, in a serious and substantial way, might even help strengthen Arab governments friendly to the United States. Encouraging in this regard is President George W. Bush's 15 March 2002 speech at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, where he promised a \$5 billion increase in official US aid over three budget years, to begin in fiscal year 2004.⁹² While it is debatable if this amount will make a significant difference, the message sent to the Middle East and other developing countries is important. Realistically, aid dispersed must be monitored carefully to prevent money from ending up in the bank accounts of foreign government officials and their cronies.

Another instrument of power that American officials should increasingly pay attention to is the diplomatic one. US

professional diplomats, including State Department Foreign Service Officers and military attaches, receive only minor public diplomacy training. According to the findings of an Independent Task Force on Public Diplomacy sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, only one hour of the seven-week course for new Foreign Service officers is dedicated to public diplomacy training.⁹³ During training, military attaches also receive little training in presenting the US perspective on events.

Additionally, America's professional diplomats are grossly under-funded when it comes to entertainment funds and budgets. Because reimbursable representational funds are extremely tight for mid-level diplomats sent abroad—a US State Department diplomat can afford to host only a few dinners or functions in his home each year—American diplomats do not have the chance to properly mix in highly social Middle Eastern societies. While opportunities are limitless to spend time with Arabs while on assignments abroad, the unwritten rule in Arab society is that you must invite to be invited. In other words, if an American diplomat does not have proper funds to host dinners and functions, and also the inclination to spend extensive time with Arabs in a social setting, then that diplomat will not be consistently invited to Arab social functions.

Real rapport between American diplomats and Arab foreign nationals, which will help dismantle distrust over time and introduce accurate American viewpoints to Arab citizens sometimes tainted by grossly inaccurate press reports, is not built by official handshakes. Confidence and trust is built by spending countless late nights together talking, eating Arabic food, and drinking coffee or tea. What might seem to some Americans as

Meyer—Arab Perceptions

idle talk and wasted time engaging in informalities builds genuine bridges between Arabs, who are typically social and hospitable by nature, and Americans seeking to help Arabs better understand the constraints and nuances of US foreign policy. Strong relationships built today between junior- and mid-level US diplomats and Arab citizens at all societal levels will be the cornerstones of future American-Middle East relations and will help overcome misunderstandings.

Closely tied to diplomacy, and directly related to proactively shaping Arab perceptions of US foreign policy, is the informational instrument of power. The State Department has the primary responsibility for public diplomacy outreach programs, but educational and cultural exchange programs have suffered drastic cuts in recent years. Since 1993, funding for such valuable resources has been cut thirty-three percent from \$349 million to \$232 million.⁹⁴ This trend must reverse itself as programs like the American Language Centers in several Arab cities provide not only English language training for young Arab students and professionals, but also put a human face on American values by placing dedicated American teachers in front of Arab audiences.

Regarding mass media and the broadcast of US views to the Arab world, American music, movies, and popular culture are popular with Arabs, but the United States has done a rather poor job in recent times of actively explaining and promoting US public positions to the Arab world. Over the past decade, US government sponsored media programs, like the Voice of America radio network, have received less priority and funding. In 2002, Christopher Ross, a retired State Department official and former Ambassador to Syria remarked, “In the ten years between the Cold

War and September 11, we had forgotten about the outside world.”⁹⁵ Public diplomacy programs are a proactive way of preventing disagreements over misinterpreted positions, and they create a more accurate public awareness in the Arab world of US intentions and positions. In short, there must be a concerted effort to deliver the “American message” to the Middle East in a format which appeals to Arabs.⁹⁶

America’s image is suffering in the Arab world. As long as Arabs perceive that America is biased in favor of Israel, and as long as Arabs contend that America’s policies hurt common Iraqi citizens, US credibility will continue to suffer amongst Arabs. To ensure unhindered diplomatic and military access to the region well into the future and to ebb the tide of extremism projecting across the Middle East and into America itself, US policy makers must act with haste to improve America’s tarnished image by employing more expansive political, economic, diplomatic, and informational instruments of power.

NOTES

¹ League of Arab States Mission official, interviewed by author, Washington, DC, 19 December 2001. Throughout this paper, because the topics are often considered rather politically sensitive, the author does not list the names of the Arab individuals interviewed. Without anonymity, Arab sources might be hesitant to discuss such subjects with a diplomat or with an American military officer, despite the fact that the topics are unclassified. This stems in part from the sources’ concern over portraying their own Arab people in a negative light (this relates, in part, to Arab culture) and for fear of their own governments possibly enacting retribution against them.

² “Secretary of State Colin Powell on CNN’s ‘Larry King Live,’” 26 November 2001, *US State Department web site*, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from <http://uninfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/01112701.html>.

³ This paper is based mostly upon comments and writings from educated, elite Arabs. By “elite” the author means Arabs generally at the top of Arab society, which is a minority. (There is not a large middle class in Arab countries.) Most Arab elites interviewed for this paper have connections or at least inroads into Arab governments. Arab sources are typically government officials, wealthy private citizens—businessmen or other professionals—and journalists. Many are Western educated, and most have either traveled extensively or lived in the West or in the United States. From his discussion with Arabs, professional readings, and personal experiences in the Middle East, the author contends that the sources’ views are representative of dominant opinions in the Arab world. When it comes to the emotional issues discussed in this essay—Iraq and the Arab-Israeli conflict—the author believes the so-called “Arab street,” or bulk of Arab citizens, feel very much the same as those in their society who are wealthier or more educated. In fact, because the “Arab street” is less exposed to outside (and various) views, and more subject to government propaganda in places like Syria, the author believes that the general populace feels even more strongly than Arab elites that American policies are biased and unjust. For instance, in the spring of 2000, a poor Syrian policeman (most Syrian policemen are poor) spoke with the author in a street in Damascus. The policeman told the author that he did not like Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and US foreign policy; this was in the wake of the failure of the Geneva summit between President Hafiz al-Asad and President Bill Clinton. The policeman, who was likely exposed mostly to Syria’s government-controlled media, could not explain why he did not like US policies, only that he despised them.

⁴ Shibley Telhami, “It’s Not About Faith: A Battle for the Soul of the Middle East,” *Current History* 100, no. 650 (December 2001): 417.

⁵ Cameron W. Barr, “US Policy in Mideast under Scrutiny,” *Christian Science Monitor Internet Edition*, 13 September 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/0913/p2s1-uspo.html>.

⁶ William Quandt, “New US Policies for a New Middle East?,” in *The Middle East and the United States: A Historic and Political Reassessment*, 2nd ed, ed. David W. Lesch (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 432. Quandt was a member of the National Security Council staff during the Nixon and Carter administrations; he was intimately involved in the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt.

⁷ Shireen T. Hunter, Director of Islam Program at Center for Strategic and International Studies, interviewed by author, Washington, DC, 18 December 2001. Hunter is also an occasional television commentator on Islamic, Middle East, and Central Asian events.

⁸ Fouad Ajami, “The Sentry’s Solitude,” *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 6 (November/December 2001): 2-3.

⁹ Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

¹⁰ Interview, Damascus, Syria, 16 June 2001.

¹¹ Numerous press items were released on this subject in January 2002. For example, see, David B. Ottaway and Robert G. Kaiser, “Saudis May Seek US Exit,” *Washington Post*, 18 January 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A64536-2002Jan17>.

¹² Mecca is considered the first most holy city in the Islamic religion, while Medina is the second most holy city. Mecca was the birthplace of Islam’s prophet Mohammed Ibn Abdullah al Quraish, and the city is the site of the annual Islamic *haj*, or pilgrimage. In the year 622, Mohammed migrated from Mecca to Medina, and eight years later he triumphantly returned and conquered Mecca. Mecca is the site of the Grand Mosque, while the Great Mosque is located in Medina.

¹³ Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ For purposes of this paper, the “Arab world” stretches from across North Africa, from Morocco to Egypt, through the Levantine states of Jordan, Syria, Israel/Palestine, into the Arabian Peninsula—including the Arabian Gulf countries, and into Iraq. This paper does not include opinion from peoples in Turkey, Iran, South Asia, or Central Asia, although individuals and states there, in many cases, would likely have similar thoughts. The paper is not concerned with Islamic opinion, per say, although the majority of people in the Arab world are Muslims. Considering Islamic versus Arab opinion toward American foreign policy opens up a separate (although sometimes common) set of concerns based on religion, or interpretation of religion. Instead, this paper seeks to explain complaints common to Arabs of various religions and ethnic sub-groups across the Arab world.

¹⁶ Rick Francona, *Ally to Adversary: An Eyewitness Account of Iraq’s Fall from Grace* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 13, 16.

¹⁷ E-mail from Syrian who grew up in Syria and spent extensive time living in the Arabian Gulf, received by author, 13 March 2002.

¹⁸ Interviews, Damascus, Syria, spring 2000.

¹⁹ Interviews with Syrian businessmen, Syrians with family links to the Syrian government, and with Arab diplomats assigned to Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

²⁰ Ahmed Bouzid, “Why Do They Hate Us So Much?,” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 20, no. 9 (December 2001): 14.

²¹ Kamil Mahdi, “The Iraq Sanctions Debate: Destruction of a People,” *Middle East International*, no. 615 (24 December 1999): 22.

²² Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

²³ Ibid. Francona’s *Ally to Adversary* briefly covers the US-Iraqi security relationship during the 1980s, including sharing technical intelligence, 9-30.

²⁴ Interview with former Iraqi citizen and Defense Language Institute Arabic language instructor, Spring 1994. This instructor’s family left Iraq because of political repression. More specifically, Iraqi internal security personnel, who demanded her brother join the military, repeatedly sought him out.

²⁵ Francona, 17. See pages 14-19 for a good description of Iraq’s pervasive security climate.

²⁶ Interview with Gulf official, December 2001.

²⁷ E-mail from Syrian cited in footnote number two above.

²⁸ Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Edward W. Said, “Gulliver in the Middle East” (an essay originally appearing in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 26 February 1998), in *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After*, updated edition, (New York: Vintage, 2001), 241.

³¹ Interview with Gulf official, December 2001.

³² Following Iraq’s obstruction of UN weapons inspectors attempting to accomplish their duties, the US military initiated strikes, called OPERATION DESERT FOX, against Iraq on 16 December 1998. Targets included suspected WMD-associated facilities, surface-to-air missile sites, command and control facilities, airfields, and Republican Guard facilities. For additional information about the

operation, see Linda D. Kozaryn, "Saddam Abused His Last Chance, Clinton Says," *American Forces Information Service News Articles*, 17 December 1998, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec1998/n12171998_9812171.htm

[1](#) and Paul Stone, "Desert Fox Target Toll Climbs Past 75 Iraqi Sites," *American Forces Information Service News Articles*, 18 December 1998, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec1998/n12181998_9812182.htm

[l.](#)

³³ Arab governments, in general, maintain rather tight control over their societies. "Spur-of-the-moment" protests in Arab states are sometimes allowed by Arab governments as a means to let common citizens vent their anger. Protests are, in effect, a pressure valve meant to dissipate anger toward outside influences and to prevent Arab citizens from turning their frustrations toward their own governments.

³⁴ Interviews with various US diplomats at US Embassy Syria, Damascus, Syria, June 1999.

³⁵ The American Embassy in Damascus is located in the upscale Malki/Abu Romani district of Damascus. The Syrian Presidential offices and apartment are located approximately a half-mile away from the embassy.

³⁶ Bouzid, 14.

³⁷ Interview with Syrian businessman with strong professional and familial links to the Syrian government, Damascus, Syria, 25 May 2001.

³⁸ Jamal Khashoggi, "War Against Terror: A Saudi Perspective," *Arab View*, Fall 2001 (no date posted), n.p., on-line, Internet, available from <http://www.arabview.com/article.asp?artID=105>.

³⁹ Palestinians are not included here, since Palestinians have not achieved governance over a sovereign Palestinian state. Instead, as of early 2002, Palestinians held autonomy over limited territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These are the areas that the Palestinian Authority hopes to incorporate into an actual, recognized state.

⁴⁰ E-mail from private Jordanian citizen living in Syria (in response to author's e-mail questions), received by author, 4 November 2001.

⁴¹ Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001. For an explanation of prominent US officials who opposed US official recognition of Israel upon creation of that country, see Robert D.

Kaplan, *The Arabists: Romance of an American Elite* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 85-87.

⁴² Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

⁴³ Group interview, Syrian Defense Minister LtGen Mustafa Talas, interviewed during visit of US Air Force War College, 14 March 2001.

⁴⁴ E-mail from private Syrian (in response to author's e-mail), received by author, 10 November 2001.

⁴⁵ William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993), 405-407, 411.

⁴⁶ Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

⁴⁷ The land Asad and the Syrians/Lebanese believed they could reacquire from Israel were territories on the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and in Southern Lebanon, the return of which is called for in UN Resolutions 242, 338, and 425. Syria exercises tremendous control over Lebanese domestic and foreign policies. Historically, Lebanon was part of Greater Syria, before the colonial British and French powers carved up the Middle East.

⁴⁸ Interviews, Damascus, Syria, fall 2000.

⁴⁹ Patrick Seale, "Bye-Bye Dennis Ross," *Al Hayat* (English version), 11 November 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from <http://www.mafhoum.com/press/sealeh2.html>. The popular story circulating around Damascus at the time of the Clinton-Asad meeting, and directly thereafter, was that Asad had swum in Lake Tiberias and barbecued on its shore as a child. Asad, however, grew up in a village in the mountains of Syria, far from Lake Tiberias. It is more likely that he never visited the lake as a child. The line of reasoning went that since Syrians had access to the lake at one time, they must again—as a result of the peace process—have access to the lake and its eastern shore.

⁵⁰ Interviews, Damascus, Syria, 2000.

⁵¹ E-mail from Syrian cited in note number 44 above.

⁵² Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Shara', "H.E. Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, at the 56th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 14 November 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from <http://www.syrianmission.org/fmeb56.htm>.

⁵³ Syrian Ambassador to the United States, H.E. Rustom Al-Zoubi, interviewed by author, Washington, DC, 20 December 2001.

⁵⁴ Interviews, Damascus, Syria, May-June 2000.

⁵⁵ Interviews, Damascus, Syria, April 2000-June 2001.

⁵⁶ Interviews, Damascus, Syria, 2001.

⁵⁷ Zoubi interview. Note that Lebanon, until the colonial powers divided the Middle East up after World War One, was part of historic Syria. Hafiz al-Asad claimed that the division between Lebanon and Syria was artificial and that the populace in the two countries was merely “One people living in two lands.”

⁵⁸ Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

⁵⁹ Sara Roy, “Why Peace Failed: An Oslo Autopsy,” *Current History* 101, no. 651 (January 2002): 16.

⁶⁰ Before the 1967 Arab-Israeli (Six-Day or June) War, Jerusalem was a partitioned city, with Israel controlling West Jerusalem, and Jordan controlling East Jerusalem. Islamic, Jewish, and Christian holy sites were all located in then-Arab territories.

⁶¹ Interviews with Palestinians and Syrians, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

⁶² Edward W. Said, “Gulliver in the Middle East” (an essay originally appearing in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 26 February 1998), in *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After*, updated edition, (New York: Vintage, 2001), 241-242.

⁶³ Dr. Lama Jamjoum, “Palestinian Opinion Pulse,” from Jerusalem Media and Communication Center, Volume 2, no.4, June 2001, n.p., on line, Internet, available from <http://www.jmcc.org/publicpoll/pop/01/jun/pop4.htm>.

⁶⁴ Augustus Richard Norton, “America’s Middle East Peace Crisis,” *Current History* 100, no. 642 (January 2001): 5.

⁶⁵ Roy, 13.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 12-13.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 15-16.

⁶⁹ Palestinian Peace Process Negotiator quoted in Debrorah Sontag, “The Palestinian Conversation,” *New York Times Magazine*, 3

February 2002, n.p., on-line, Intenet, available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/03/magazine/03PALESTINE.html>.

⁷⁰ The first *intifada*, or Palestinian uprising, occurred from 1987-1991. It is often credited with forcing the Israelis to the peace table. Regarding the first *intifada*, Dilip Hiro wrote, “Actions by the Israeli security forces—involving firings, curfews, harassment, arrests and house searches and demolitions—severely disrupted Palestinian life. During the first four years of the intifada 1413 Palestinians were killed. . . . The refusal of the Palestinians to call off the *intifada*, convinced the Israeli government of the futility of continued suppression of them and denial of their national identity and the right to self-rule, and paved the way for the Israeli-Palestinian Liberation Organization Accord in September 1993.” Dilip Hiro, *Dictionary of the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 123-124.

⁷¹ The *al-Aqsa* Mosque, from where Muslims believe the prophet Mohammed ascended into heaven, is also in the direct vicinity of the Jews’ historic Temple Mount site.

⁷² Author personally observed riots and demonstrations in Damascus in October 2000.

⁷³ Dr. Shafeeq N. Ghabra, “Violent Face of Extremism Unveiled,” *Gulfwire: Voices from the Region*, 1 November 2001, n.p., on-line, e-mailed to author. *Gulfwire* located at www.arabialink.com/GulfWire.

⁷⁴ Mustafa Kamel El-Sayad, “To An American Friend,” *Al-Ahram Weekly On-line*, no. 561, 22-28 November 2001, n.p., on-line, Intenet, available from www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/2001/561/op10.htm.

⁷⁵ “US Vetoes UN Terror Resolution,” *USA Today.com, World*, 15 December 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2001/12/15/us-veto.htm>.

⁷⁶ Dr. John Duke Anthony, “The Impact of the Palestinian Al-Aqsa *Intifada* on US Relations with Key Arab Countries: The GCC Region,” testimony delivered to the US House of Representatives, United States Congress, Washington, DC, 31 July 2001.

⁷⁷ Former US Defense Attaché to Saudi Arabia (and former US Defense Attaché to Syria) Col Bernard J. Dunn, interviewed by author, Washington, DC, 22 December 2001.

⁷⁸ Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Ryan C. Crocker, United States State Department, interviewed by author, Washington, DC, 21 December 2001.

⁷⁹ Discussions with senior Arab military officers in multiple Arab countries, August 2002.

⁸⁰ Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz quoted in Elaine Sciolino, “Saudi Affirms US Ties but Says Bush Ignores Palestinians’ Cause,” *The New York Times on the Web*, 29 January 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/29/international/middleeast/29SAUD.html>.

⁸¹ Remarks delivered by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Africa and the Middle East Molly Williamson during National Council on US-Arab Relations conference, Washington, DC, 9 September 2002. While overall trade with the Arab world was down, however, in Jordan, where between fifty and sixty percent of the population is Palestinian and thus seemingly motivated to closely scrutinize ties with the US over grievances, that country’s trade with the US was up by twenty-nine percent by early September 2002 in comparison with the January-September timeframe in 2001. This is despite ongoing fierce Palestinian and Israeli retribution and counter-retribution in 2002.

⁸² Donna Abu-Naser, “Saudi: US Can’t Use Kingdom to Attack Iraq,” *Washington Post*, 8 August, 2002, available from Gemstar E-Book. Syria has undoubtedly been prompted to pragmatically cooperate with the US in the war against terrorism because Damascus has also historically opposed Islamic extremists. President Hafiz al-Asad waged an internal war against the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria in the late 1970s and early 1980s, culminating in the death of multiple thousands in Hama in 1982.

⁸³ Howard Schnider, “Syria Evolves as Anti-Terror Ally,” *Washington Post*, 24 July 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A60219-2002Jul24.html.

⁸⁴ Todd S. Purdum, “Saudis Indicating US Can Use Bases if UN Backs War,” *New York Times*, 16 September 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from www.nytimes.com/2002/09/16/international/middleeast/16IRAQ.html.

⁸⁵ Daniel Williams and Nora Boustany, “Arab Countries Bending to US Influence on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, 23 September 2001, page A-01, on-line, Internet, available from www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A53133-2002Sep22.

⁸⁶ Walter Pincus, “Hussein Tries to Mend Fences with Neighbors: Officials Say Iraq Acts to Forestall US Attack,” *Washington Post*, 19 July 2002, available from Gemstar E-Book. This article states the US

is spending \$1 billion to upgrade and expand military facilities in Qatar.

⁸⁷ “General: US Set for Any Iraq Action,” *Associated Press*, 21 September 2002, available through America Online.

⁸⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations: Remaking of the World Order* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1996), 209.

⁸⁹ “Number of Jobless Saudis Hits 3.2 Million,” *Reuters* Press Service, 22 September 2002, available through America Online.

⁹⁰ “Text of UN Security Council Resolution on Mideast,” *Reuters* Press Service, 13 March 2002, available through America Online.

⁹¹ Karen DeYoung, “President Outlines Vision for Mideast: Palestinian Statehood Depends on Arafat’s Removal, Bush Says,” *Washington Post*, 25 June 2002, available Gemstar E-book.

⁹² Andrzej Zwanecki, “President Bush Committed to Development, State’s Larson Says,” *Washington File, US Department of State International Information Programs*, 18 March 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from www.uninfo.state.gov/cgi-bin/washfile/display.pl?p=/products/washfile/la.../newsitem.shtml 3/18/02.

⁹³ Peter G. Peterson, “Public Diplomacy and the War on Terrorism,” *Foreign Affairs* 81 no. 6 (September/October 2002): 89.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹⁵ Karen DeYoung, “Bush to Create Formal Office to Shape US Image Abroad,” *Washington Post*, 30 July 2002, A1, A13.

⁹⁶ A couple of encouraging recent developments have taken place in this area. In the spring of 2002, Radio Sawa began broadcasting to the Arab world in a format more attractive to young audiences. Additionally, the Bush Administration announced in the summer of 2002 its plan to create an Office of Global Communications out of the White House as lead agent for public diplomacy.